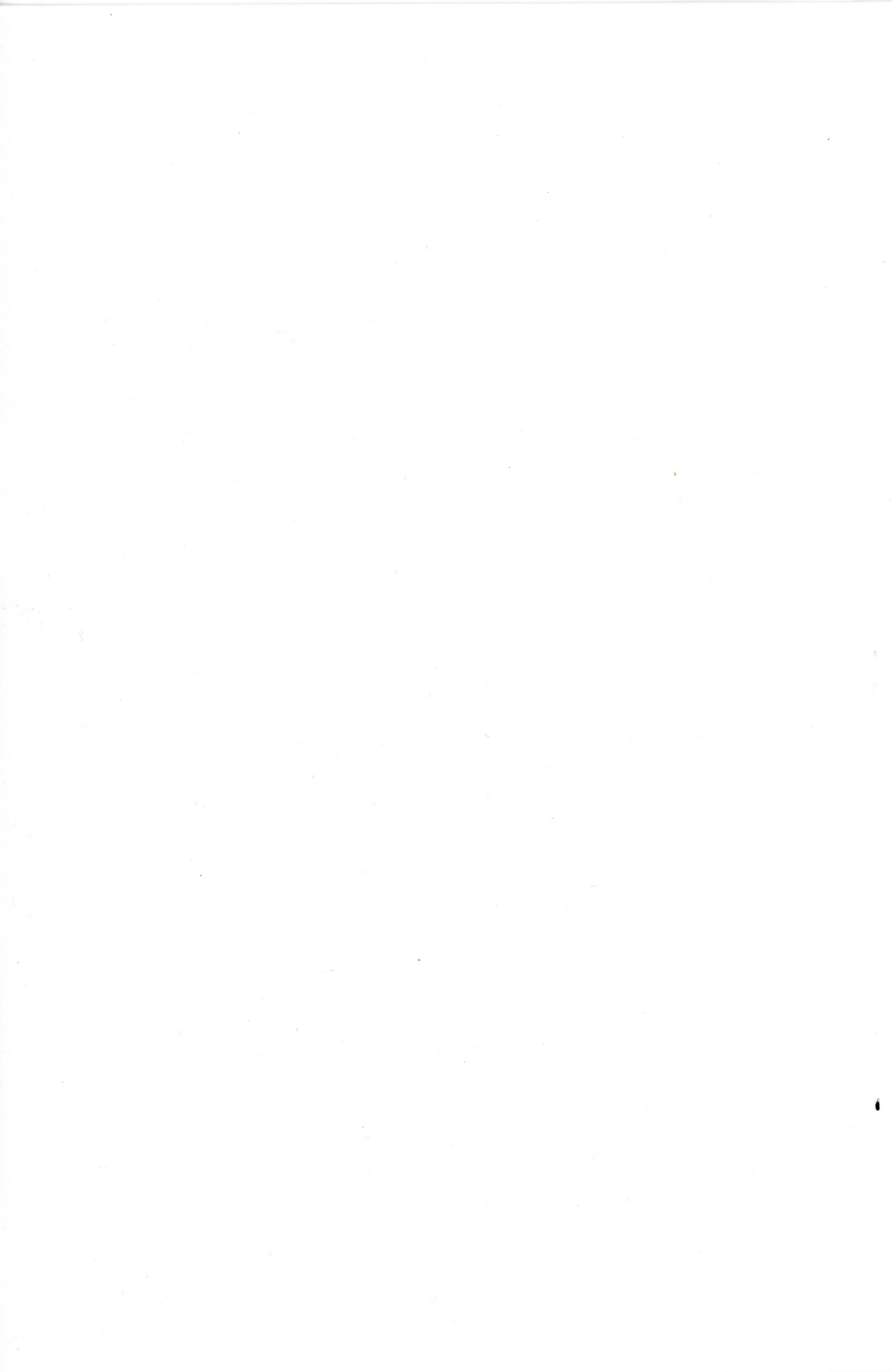




THE GLEANER

2016/17





Glow.

*Tori Peterson
(Front Cover)*

The Gleaner is a theme-based literary journal edited by the undergraduate students at Delaware Valley University.

We showcase all forms of written work as well as artwork and photography pieces.

This year's theme is *What Keeps You Up at Night?*

Sweet dreams...



THE GLEANER

POETRY

Fie *Katelyn Lucas* 8

My Body Nightmare *Sashka Wieterzen* 9

To Talk of Rot *Wendy Peterson* 14

Troubled Sheep *Alesandra Temerte** 17

Glazed. *Taylor Blasko* 25

Afraid you'll sniff me out *Wendy Peterson* 28

Eight *Caroline Wernicki** 48

Burnout *Taylor Blasko* 51

Bottle-Rockets *Wendy Peterson* 55

AWAKE *Abdullah Pullin* 56

**High School Writing Competition Winner*



2016/17

PROSE

Necropsy *Katelyn Lucas* 10

Just Another Nightmare *Katerina Ramos* 19

Scar *Katelyn Lucas* 26

Another Sleepless Night *Alesandra Temerte** 45

The Way Things Are *Emma Conard* 46

Heavy *Katelyn Lucas* 49

It Matters *Taylor Blasko* 52

The Noctum Cloud *Jonas Schlichter** 57

**High School Writing Competition Winner*



THE GLEANER

ARTWORK/PHOTOGRAPHY

Brittany Watson

"You're a Little Late" 41

Jacqueline Lockwood

"The Wild Within" 36

John Wasson

"Dem Bones" 41

Kaliopé Vaporakis

"Bad Wolf" 34

Katrina Elk

"Who's Out There?" 29

"A Little to the Left" 40

"Insomniac" 44

"Book-Buried" 44

Kayla Trace

"Coping" 29

"Corridor" 40

"Abandonment" 42

Kristen Viviano

"An Apple a Day" 31

Kristina Fournier

"Las Vegas" 32

"Nope. Thank You. :)" 38

"Window in the Shadows" 39



2016/17

ARTWORK/PHOTOGRAPHY

Kyle Landis

"That's Hot." 36

"Paper Top" 37

"Groovy" 42

"It Wasn't Me" 43

Linda Fanning Lefevre

"Tokyo Fish Market" 30

"Tim Warfield Band Michener Reflection" 31

Omari Mooring

"Galaxy Lion" 35

Tori Peterson

"Through Rose-Colored Glass" 32

"Ride" 33

"Energy" 33

"Sunset in Happy Valley" 34

"Zoom" 35

"Watchful Eyes" 37

"County" 38

"After the Storm" 39

"In the Night" 43

STAFF 68

COLOPHON 70

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 71

STAY CONNECTED 72



Katelyn Lucas

Fie, fortuitous fuckery of the interstellar,
titular fear;
cerulean planets condemn the peculiar,
whisper apocalypse
to the smoldering heathen,
the pulchritudinous fool,
the repugnant cunt.

My Body Nightmare

Sashka Wieterzen

Men write my body like breasts, like eyes, like locks, like soft flesh, yielding thighs, like vacant lot like ply ply pliable, smooth, sanctified. But my body is stretchmarks is sweat under breasts is gunk in my eyes, like grease-hair upon waking, flab and fur, jiggle and taut like a lot of something applied to living – trace the scars, the prickle of hairs on calves that feel best when they're shaved down to nothing that skin you paint smooth – we're trained – trained to shave everyday before we know anything else of what to do with this breach in body-etiquette, trained to love the feel of that close-shave take away itches tangled close to goose-bumps shivering in cold, taught to feel the uncomfortable – not trained to be okay with our own hair, our own breasts that aren't perfect-round for palms to grasp but squat beauties without a backbone, limping towards our bellies hardly paved flat without wrinkles or pockets of more of our energy, our stay-put, house-bound energy. Men write my body for the plow, brainless, faceless – absorbed by spots they've taught to us to have stand out and the only thing worth noticing when you trace that body with your groping, lustung over the nearest entity to your feelings, the only sin is how much I love the close-shave of my legs and the stabilizing of breasts in their chained plumps of something for others to be pleased with. I sin when I take pleasure from the shave – turn my parts into debris, trim the unwanted from a frame that blooms only in the hands of men. Only under their gaze. A nameless pleasure built into me.

Necropsy

Katelyn Lucas

STEP ONE:

Slowly, carefully, you must extract the eyeball. Yes, the eye must be removed first. You each have to do one; the right and the left. Remove both. The scalpel slides between cornea and epithelial tissue, severing eyelid to ear hole and peeling it back. Reach the blade into the eye socket, sever the ties. Careful not to pierce aqueous humor. Tilt the head forward, it's beginning to dangle. You can be more aggressive, the chicken won't take it personally, it's dead. Cut it off. Get it out. Won't take it personally, don't take it personally, but do *nothing* personally, apparently. They tell me not to write about something personal, something that *actually* happened to me. They say it isn't mature, that I need to learn to imagine beyond my experiences. Well *fuck* they. You can take that as my personal introduction to you, my character, profanity. And the setting: it's fiction, isn't it? Who's to say what's real and what's imagined? And besides. Sometimes I think the only way to be original anymore is to write about what you've experienced, because no one else has. Is that the resolution to this story already? Well if it is, I wonder what happens when it comes at the beginning. But I'd ask myself why I feel so damn *boring*, then, anything but a unique existence. Maybe it's like what happens when you take the eye out of a chicken before anything else. When you do get it out, when the window is opened, what's left?

STEP TWO:

Drench the bird before you cut it open so the feathers don't fly everywhere. Warning to the squeamish: there will be blood. Fresh, flaming blood, pouring from the openings because this chicken was euthanized only minutes ago. If you feel like you're going to pass out, get out of the lab. And if the smell is bothering you, put on a mask. Masks don't cover smells. Their shapeless forms have the power to waft through even space-time if you have a good enough nose. A nose with real character, of exceptional shape on the face. Those are the ones with the ability to differentiate the scents of streets in foreign cities, the smell on a person's clothes. The ones that gush bright red when their hypersensitive interiors are afflicted, bleeding, not unlike your thoughts, fresh from a place that you thought you'd been in only minutes ago when you smell it again. Taking you on a trip down memory lane, that devious bitch, plucking feathers from distorted skin that bleeds as the smells turn sour with time. Yes, smells can travel through space-time, but they are not immutable. Though on second thought, maybe it is merely *we* that are not immutable, forced to deal with the worldly conflicts of time over the course of one life when there's many. Ah *hell*.

STEP THREE:

Now you can begin to extract the organs. Start with the reproductive system. You probably won't find eggs; these animals aren't usually productive after living

in the labs. Then move onto the liver. That's usually where the most lesions are found. The liver absorbs all the trials and tribulations of life. Detoxes them. Once that's out of the way, you can get to the lungs. The heart. A lung sandwich with one heart in the middle. Two and one makes three. When I was really little, I vaguely remember going to this tea party thing. Just my mom, my grandma, and me. It must've been at some historical site because there were a bunch of old people there. Though old I guess is more relative term now. But what I really remember is this tea-leaf reader. After finishing my tea I went by myself into her tent, yes, she was definitely under a tent, handed her my cup and took a seat directly across from her. I remember staring into her face, though now she seems to be morphing into the faces of the many elderly women snapshotted in my memory. Most of the time she was a tiny, fragile woman with bright wispy white hair, not buzzed real short or permed but hanging straight just below her earlobes. I picture those lobes most of all now, dangling like loops of intestine, stretched from years of burdensome earrings because I couldn't meet her eyes, tiny hands folded in the loops of my sundress. I don't remember why. I can't even picture her eyes now. But I remember her unsteady voice whispering about cats and dreams only a child could remember. Though oddly enough I get the sense that I couldn't remember all that she was saying to me during the moment either. But what burdens my mind is her weighted lobes leaning with her as she pointed into my tea cup, telling me that my life would revolve around the number three. How does the saying go...bad things come in threes? Or third time's the charm? *But the thing is*, I thought, *I already had a life started, it was already in the process happening, so how could she know a thing like that?* And I've since learned that the number three is ominous largely in American culture only. For many other cultures, the fated number is four. Four, like meeting the four horsemen of the apocalypse tattooed on a German Pilgrim's arm in an Irish bar in Florence. It's a symbol, don't you see? It would be too fantastic of a character to be real, to be anything in a story but a symbol. Its insistence would make fiction unbelievable. But that old lady was definitely right; I see that now in my life after childhood. Life does revolve around threes. The living, the dead, and the unborn. Breathe in, breathe out, bleed. Two and one makes three. Though, now that I think about it, the liver has four lobes. *Fuck.*

STEP FOUR:

Sever the trachea from the body for examination. It will be buried under everything else that must be removed first: esophagus, heart, lungs, etc. Deep inside the body, below all that, is where you will find the trachea. Keep in mind that humans produce their voice from the larynx, which is connected to the bronchi of the lungs by the trachea. But birds like our chicken here have a syrinx instead, which produces *sound*, not *voice*, directly from the base of their trachea. The trachea feels exactly like a bendy straw. I remember. Squeeze it, bend it, suck the juices through it till you can't extract anymore. But there's not supposed to be juices in it; its supposed to be hollow. Juice in the trachea is choking, swallowing saliva down the wrong pipe. Like making out with someone and the juices begin

to flow like blood caught in the trachea of a chicken—blood rushes your face and you're hot. Sweat dampens your skin under the grasping of fingertips and as your breath begins to catch in your throat time feels slower though it's passing faster in the feeling of. Everything. Hot breath in your ear, lips, tongue on your neck counting one two three is this exciting for you? Is this what you've been craving all along? *Fuck* you. The problem is, while your hands are up his shirt and his hands are down your pants you begin to question why the juices seem to be catching in your *throat* of all places, and why your trachea feels like a bendy straw being sucked so hard the juice is now caught there, choking your voice box on the word STOP that you can't quite vocalize as his teeth clamp around soft flesh but you're *thinking* it. But brain isn't part of the trinity, so he won't know that, perhaps wouldn't care anyway but you shouldn't assume that despite the tension building, the passion tightens around the straw, insert with caution—how's that for a climax? How will this be resolved? It won't. It never is, because he's ripped a hole in your trachea like a straw with no suction and the airs of voice spill out the slit in the side, a deaf whisper to the wind tilting earlobes. Lean in and listen: this isn't me, that's why it says "your" this time. It could be anyone. It isn't personal; it isn't real. It's a story. And I'm a liar. But you don't care. You don't even know who I am. And neither did he.

STEP FIVE:

Now that you've removed all of the interior organs from the body you can dissect them individually for internal evidence of residual damage. Make sure you cut the heart bilaterally so half of it can be sent to the lab for analysis. And don't forget to weigh all the major organs. The difference matters. Weigh out the major moments of your life like feathers in Osiris' scale so you can find the heart that lays like a rock in the stomach of Ammit. The Devourer was a woman, by the way. Go figure. *Fuck* the patriarchy. *Fuck* judgment. *Fuck* death. *Fuck* devouring hearts in the pews of a funeral or in between sheets. *Fuck* crying. *Fuck* tears for people that weigh on you like blood clots on the heart. *Fuck* pining over people that exist only as weightless feathers on a fictional scale when you're what's caught like earthly gravel undigested in the bile of Ammit's stomach. But it isn't gravel, I know that now. It's the materialized gastroliths sedimenting in the gizzards of dinosaurs as much as it is the atoms of the cosmos eventually reclaiming their debt. Plop them on the scale. The dead. The living. The unborn. One. Two. Three.

STEP SIX:

Open the organs of the digestive system last. They emit the most pungent odor, and we don't want to be dealing with *that* the whole time. Examine the contents of the intestines, the crop, and the gizzard. Yes, the gizzard is rather beautiful, I suppose, but you should be paying attention to the inner contents. It's just gravel, you say? Precisely. How is it possible that the gizzard is the most beautiful part of the chicken's anatomy? Not the brain that's been mangled by the bone cutters cracking skull, not the eggs growing veiny with lifeblood, not the indistinguishable shape of the lung and definitely not the heart, stained blackened red with mottled clots of euthanasia. Suffocation. But the gizzard, weighing like a rock in

your palm, glows with a white starburst on either side, a moonstone, the milkway galaxy tinged with purple nebulas along its outer rim. I had this theory that if you dissect the contents of a story into its basic components of action you can figure out how to build one yourself, how to build meaning. The problem is, I realized, it's not a surgery. It's a necropsy. And the story dies. And often, nowadays, the story dies without even revealing the most beautiful part. Perhaps because there isn't one. Though we've reached the conclusion here now too, haven't we? So you should've figured that out by now. We can't believe anymore that all these divided parts make the same whole when you piece them back together again. The chicken's already dead. After all, we took out its eyes first. And humans don't have gizzards.

To Talk of Rot

Wendy Peterson

And shall I not talk about the rot of my own body –
the external veins red in their tips fingering
the placid-swallow of a clear tornadic lake?

Shall I not talk of deterioration –
nursing globs and chunks of myself, spewing innards,
and shall I not talk about the boxes of shame
women were shedded in weeks at the time
of falling apart – ripping, shredding, part-by-part, dying –
like the contagion they are like the destruction they are,
disease and waste cowered in their own dripping sewage
reeking of a corner darkened by an all-wood, outcast wall –
puttied and stenchd with no windows, it was shame –
marring relations, embarrassed, it was corruption
damnation – seeping out of cracks in her body
fault-lines, her-quakes, it was spoil, natural disaster,
it was mess, sloppy, it was pure –
Purely the woman's problem.
Woman be tidy Woman be clean,
to bleed leave no splatter of existence,
all absence, No Caesarian stabbing
23 insults in skewered-pricks to a gut's softness,
the cramping of an existence into what *they* say
is okay-not-okay to be visible.

They miss the beauty in the tightening
and the slow bleed of a red-river constant
in its pulsing, rippling night and day
into a larger pool of glistening bloodied self
goried and drained.
Red-river constant in its bobbing basin –
drowned babies sobbed in birthing-strips
of body into a ghost-thin liquid, mucus
(a handle-flush away – turning face), The Shame
that beads heavy from the burden
at the crossroads of your legs.

Shall I not talk of rot, and how much blood,

scrolling and waxy, can look like a twig
just touching the breakless-surface of such a lake,
such an ocean, bending under chafed thighs stretched
wide enough to keep men safe from the knowing,
to keep women from the knowing of their own pain,
the pain: A finger dipped in wax and the patient,
waiting-out of the burn to cool, numb, blister out of scorching
and the peel was like relieving myself of dead flesh –
purging, smoothing-out of bumps and abrasions,
I wanted it to melt, solid on my skin,
so I could feel what it might have been
to catch each marooned-drop at the back of a neck –
scalded and blushed under wings that couldn't match
the feathering of the sun's rays out until they touched
each wave of a sea-shine glitter, a sea-smack death
gleaming in that at-last exhilaration of your gut
rushing skyward to meet your brain, throbbed
and squeezing out cloudy from your eyes, tears –
flashing back a wounded sag into the sky-dive
tumble. Icarused to a sea of cement
that bubbled as you tided the ripples
sloshing back and sank your way breathless
and guzzled in brine thrashing to the bottom –

We watch our own death, our own life
slip out of us, fade
into myth. Dear body disgusting.

The Repulse:

to flush away without looking –
avoid the stuckage in the plumbing.
Hoping, not to be caught up on the self
discarded into that twisted dark.

Bleeding is only beauty
for the shadows-exile
and the perfume of bodies bathing in it –
a shame-shed and humiliation.

And shall we not talk of rot?

Rot of my beautiful bleed.

Menstruation, thrashing
firebolt-wide in the sucking
at the otherside of a lidded toilet-seat.

My tragic Icarus
discharged from the sky.
My sky My body My bleed.

Troubled Sheep

Alessandra Temerte

*First Place 9th/10th Grade Poetry
Central Bucks East, Ms. Remar*

One frilly sheep jumping over a fence,
Its thin threads of fur turning black.
Two troubled sheep tripping over a grave—
I'm the weary, young girl stumbling back.

Three projects, three papers, and three practice exams,
Wrapping their cold hands around my warm heart.
Four heavy textbooks that are crushing my breath—
Boulders of anxiety, but I can't fall apart.

Five hours of sleep the previous night,
But I'm still trembling from the things I don't know.
Six torn and packed journals that I'm waiting to burn,
Full of mistakes that were ages ago.

Seven days-worth of lessons to learn,
And I'm not talking equations in math—
Eight friendships broken and barren and bare.
I'm talking lessons of pain, heartbreak, and wrath.

Nine thousand flaws that I first have to count,
Marked with faint lines where scars used to bleed.
Ten darkened veins that are surging with ink—
From my head, I cannot be freed.

Eleven million youths in this world,
Whose stories cause me to break.
Twelve strikes on the clock—it's midnight again,
And I'm still lying wide and awake.

Eleven million adolescents alone,
Struggling with their own demons within.
Ten every moment that finally rest
From the pill bottles they label with sin.

Nine Polaroid photos that I swept under my bed
Because they remind me too much of what's lost.
Eight billion flaws with our system today—

It defines a life with a cost.

Seven sorrows slipping through my crowded mind,
And I remember the void of my bed—
Six reasons I should be up and about
Instead of filling my soul with more dread.

Five pages stained with coffee and tears,
The beaks of flitting words pecking at me.
Four pieces of glass lodged deep in my brain—
I'm trapped, but there is no key.

Three panic attacks under pressure and fear,
The blood in our bodies like snow.
Two years remaining ensnared in a cage,
But then a prison life left to go.

There's no more sheep left to count when it's dark,
And all of them were placed in a grave,
And there's nothing left to lull me to sleep
Because there's one life that I couldn't save.

Just Another Nightmare

Katerina Ramos

I'm curled up in my bed, the lights are off in my room casting me in complete and utter darkness. Just the way I liked it nowadays. There once was a time where I would have preferred a night-light to keep me company in the dark room, but now the dark and emptiness is welcomed by my tortured soul. It helps me forget everything of the past two weeks. I shudder at the mere thought of two weeks ago. I turned in my bed as an attempt to put it behind me. As I laid in bed to try my luck at sleep, my mind shifted to explore into the very dark thoughts that kept me up at night. I shoved my face into my pillow hard as I was ripped viciously into a reverie of my living nightmare. I let out an audible whimper of agony, as if the memory physically hurt.

I jumped into my Ford Fusion in the mall parking lot excitedly and unlocked the passenger side door for my best friend, Jane. As she clambered into the car herself, I shot a quick text out to another one of my friends and turned on the car. I clicked my seatbelt, put the car in reverse and pulled out of my parking space. I started our journey back to her house where I had picked her up a few hours previously, as I drove I looked at her out of the corner of my eye and smiled. "Does it hurt at all?" I whispered as if it was a secret. Jane had just gotten her belly button pierced and I was so very curious. Jane gave an electric smile, "Only if I hunch over honestly, but other than that nah." I always loved hanging out with Jane, she was fun, spunky, and full of freewill that I wish I had more of. In a way I was jealous of how beautiful of a person she was and wished I could be her. I shook my head slightly, "I'm so jealous I wish my mom would have let me get one." The conversation continued on this subject for a small amount of time. Eventually it fell flat, but that wasn't the problem.

I stopped at a stop sign, looked both ways and continued on the straight road ahead of me. We were sitting in silence when, without realizing it, I drifted to the side of the road enough to hit a ditch. Hard.

Everything was going so fast.

I remembered jerking my wheel to the left,

a scream,

a huge crunch,

and then nothing.

Very slowly my senses came back to me one at a time. The first was my

hearing, all that was being processed as sound was the scrapping of metal above my head, then an eerie silence. I would have preferred to keep on hearing the scraping over nothing at all. Slowly I was able to see in front of me and at first I saw the asphalt, then I looked a bit lower. There was so much blood in front me, looking past the crimson red painting, I made out a steering wheel with an air bag sticking out of it. [Oh no.] I thought to myself in horror. [Oh god please no.] Everything felt like it was standing still as I looked around, in horror, the interior of my car. There was so much blood everywhere, the bright red color seeming to scream at you from the ivory colored interior. When I looked to the passenger side I saw Jane staring at me looking completely unharmed, but strange. I let out a hoarse sigh of relief when I saw my best friend. I didn't kill her. I reached out hastily and touched her arm frantically, she smiled softly at me as I screamed out in a rough voice, "Jane! Oh my god! Are you ok? I can't believe I crashed the car!" Jane stared at me back almost outlandishly and gave a soft nod. She squeezed my hand once. Comforted by the thought that she was fine I fished my phone out of my jacket pocket and called 9-1-1.

"9-1-1 what's your emergency?"

"I-I-I crashed my car."

"Where is your location ma'am?"

"I-I-I'm not too sure hold on."

I turned to look next to me to ask Jane where we were and saw she wasn't there. [No.] I thought in horror. [She was right there, I touched her! No! No! No! Oh god please no. Let this be a sick joke. No! I TOUCHED HER. Oh god no please don't say I killed her! God please! I. Touched. Her. How could she not be there?! No. This. This. God please no, not Jane. Not her.] There was tears streaming down my face now and I was numb. Everything was going blurry and I vaguely heard myself screaming her name. The phone long forgotten in my hand as I was trying to fight the reality in front of me. [God no don't be true. Please! I'll do anything! This can't be happening! Please!] Eventually a pair of rough hands grabbed me and pulled me out from my upturned car. I was kicking and screaming and crying, "NO SHE CAN'T BE GONE. JANE! JANE!" My throat felt like it was getting ripped to ribbons from my blood curdling screams.

Now I was on the pavement on my hands and knees. Feeling like if I didn't hold on to the ground I was going to fly up into the empty space of Hell. My eyes slid over the scene around me and vaguely I saw a body on the pavement a few feet behind my upturned car. Next thing I know I'm on my feet sprinting to the body, blood dripping from my forehead down onto the black pavement as I ran. I dropped myself down on the ground next to Jane's body and let out a scream. I don't even know if it was an actual word, but I screamed. My

scream was the only thing I heard that was reality. I held her limp, lifeless mangled body in my hands and stared at the horror I've done while wailing in grief. [I killed her. I killed my best friend. I'm the reason that her family will have a hole, the reason that they won't have to walk her down the aisle on her wedding day. I'm the reason she will never see the light of day ever again. Oh god.] I was choking on tears as I wailed.

I don't know how long I sat like that, just screaming and crying.

Eventually I was ripped away from her body and put into an ambulance, before they put me into the ambulance I saw the EMTs put her in a body bag and at that point I knew it was true.

I killed my best friend, I was a murderer.

I grit my teeth hard and hissed out a string of curse words while curling up in a tight ball trying to suppress the physical pain and sickness I felt over that night. The stitches in my forehead were still relatively tender and burned every time I thought of the night, as if a sick reminder that I had a scar to remember it for the rest of my life. I let my breath release into the pillow and rolled out of bed to sprint into my bathroom in the darkness. I ducked my head into the toilet and ejected out the memory of the night. After a while resting my stitches on the toilet seat trying to keep the sickness at bay, I flipped on the bathroom light and stared into horrendous reflection in the mirror. At one point I may have been considered to be full of life and happiness, but now all you saw in my face was agony and torture. My eyes no longer held life in them, like I was just an empty soul just existing, not living. Staring at my reflection made me wince as I recalled a few days earlier when I was staring at the same ghoulish face.

I stared at myself in the mirror for the first time since the car crash, I looked like death. It was clear I hadn't eaten in a week and a half, my eyes were sunken in and had large dark circles under them. My skin looked pale green with my complexion. I let out a large sigh and took out my make-up bag. I was dressed in all black for Jane's funeral and if it were a different situation I probably would've looked fantastic, but it wasn't. I really didn't want to go, but I owed it to her to go to her funeral. No matter how wrong it felt to go. I bit my bottom lip hard to keep the tears at bay while I tried to look a little bit less like death for this occasion.

For the only thing that really mattered to me in the last week and a half.

I walked into the funeral parlor hesitantly and froze mid step as everyone in the room turned to face me with accusing glares. I took in a breath and averted my eyes from meeting any open glares. I hurried my way to the back of the room resisting the urge to just turn and sprint out the doors and pretend I had

never come. My breathing became uneven as I practically suctioned myself to the back wall of the room and tried not to mentally break down right then and there. I kept my eyes glued to the floor as I desperately wished time would suddenly go as fast as it had at the crash. All of Jane's immediate family's stares felt like scorch marks from fire on me; I felt every single stare as if they were all slaps of reality for what I've done. After keeping my eyes glued at the ground for about ten minutes, a pair of shoes made their way up to me. I snapped my head up in shock and stared at the person in the eyes.

It was Jane's brother, his face was red and puffy from crying. He looked unbelievably furious with me. My heart broke just staring at him so upset until he let out a snarling growl towards me, "You. You-You-You fuckin' bitch. How dare you show your face at her funeral?! You're the reason why we even have to have one!" His voice was steadily rising as he fought to control his rage with his accusations. I was desperately trying to become one with the wall as he was yelling at me. "It was your responsibility as the driver to make sure she put on her damn seatbelt! How could you be such an irresponsible person?" Everyone had their eyes on us now and I couldn't stop staring at him in front of me, it was like watching a natural disaster, I just couldn't look away. I wanted to sink to the floor and curl up in a ball and pretend the whole situation wasn't happening. At the same time I was starting to become overwhelmed with nausea and my head was throbbing from the strain of not bawling as I was frozen in place by his hostility. He was absolutely terrifying at the moment, he was stocky with maybe an inch above me in height and he looked livid with hatred. He was in my face now screaming, "Well? What do you have to say for yourself? You fuckin' showed your face up here, what the hell do you have to say for yourself?" I was cowering into the wall. In a way I brought this on to myself, I couldn't bring myself to even speak to their mother and step father when they came to identify the body as Jane's. I was just able to break eye contact enough with his hatred blue eyes to shove my face into the wall. "I'm so sorry James, I really am." I whimpered out meekly, that's all I could say, how could you ever make up for killing someone's family member? Suddenly James grabbed me by the front of my dress and ,with one hand, kept me still while with the other gave me a swift and solid punch across the face. He released me to drop to the floor, my stitches had been ripped open from the force of his hit and little blood droplets hit the floor. As he walked away with tears rolling down his face he sneered over his shoulder, "How could you live with yourself. Get the fuck out of here now. A monster like you doesn't even belong here." His words daggers through my body as I sat on the floor stunned by the abuse I just suffered by him. James was always level headed and never let any emotion show. I looked around and scrambled to my feet. People were still staring and I couldn't handle it anymore.

I ran.

I knew I shouldn't have, but I couldn't handle it anymore. I didn't even

see the casket I just ran out of the room and straight to my mom's car. I shoved my keys into the ignition with tears streaming down my face getting mixed with the crimson guilt trickling down my face. I drove back to my house in a blur. The right side of my face was throbbing from James' punch and I couldn't see out of my right eye, but that pain didn't compare to the empty void I felt in the middle of my chest for what I had done a week and a half ago. When I got home I ran into the door and saw my mom. "Sweetie are you ok? Why are you home so early? Why is your cheek bruised?" My mom let out a tiny audible gasp, "Why are you bleeding?!" I shook my head hard and tried so hard to hold back a sob, "Nothing Mom I'm fine, I swear, I just. I couldn't do it. I'm sorry mom I couldn't. I-I-I can't do this. I wasn't ready to go back out yet." The tears were really going now and I felt the sobs in my chest and before I knew it my mom had her arms around me in a warm embrace and she comforted me while I bawled my eyes out and she cleaned up my appearance.

I felt myself become succumbed to my nausea and ran to my toilet to vomit once again. Again my nausea ceased and I flushed the toilet while watching all of it go away. [I wish I could just go away.] I thought bitterly to myself. I rested my forehead on the cool toilet seat and closed my eyes and let the tears stream down my face. [I can't keep living like this. I can't eat, sleep, or function.] I bit my bottom lip to keep from making any audible sounds as I let the tears stream down my face. Eventually I lifted my head from the toilet seat enough to glance at my bathroom cabinet. [Maybe I can go away, forget all about pain and this emptiness.] The thought trailed off in my mind and the thought sobered me up from self-loathing. [Can I really do that? *Would* I be able to do that?] I got up slowly to my feet for fear of becoming nauseous again and made my way to the cabinet hesitantly. I opened it up slowly and saw the razors sitting there as if they had been begging for me to think of this act.

I tentatively retrieved one and closed the door to my cabinet, then the bathroom door. All the while staring at the razor I held in my hand. I took in a deep breath and made my way to the edge of the bathtub. I stared at the smooth surface of the interior of my tub, my hands were trembling now. [I can't seriously be considering this right now, can I?] I took a deep breath and clambered into the tub, being careful of the sharp razor in my hand. [Am I really going to do this? Is the situation that bad?] The answer to that question was pretty clear. [I can't live like this anymore.] The gnawing emptiness I felt within my chest was relentless around the edges, it made it impossible to ignore it and impossible to feel any emotion. [This isn't living.] I thought to myself definitely. [This is just existing for the sake of existing.] I exhaled hesitantly, my fingers were trembling intensely now as I stared at the sharp metal object that will be deciding my future in the next few moments. [This is the only way out. Right? I will never be able to find release unless I do this. There is no going back to the happy life I lived before. Not without changing the past.] I started to hear the steps creak and my mom call, "Honey? Are you ok? I heard you vomit. Do you need me to come in?"

My blood ran ice cold as I stared down at the razor in my possession, my hands suddenly steadied themselves. "No mom, I'm fine." My voice came out calmer than I felt. The steps continued to creak as she head up the stairs and in that moment I knew I had to do it. My other option was to get caught and have to see psychiatrists, to keep on existing, feeling the emptiness, and not being able to live. I would be forever haunted by this crash with no end in sight until I was at least 70. I would be under constant supervision. The thought of having to keep going on made me completely sure of what I needed to do. [I need to do it now.] I thought to myself firmly. I brought the razor to my forearm and stared at it for a moment, this will be the last thing I will ever have to do. Feeling like a Shakespearean tragedy, with the razor ever so poised, deadly on my forearm.

I sucked in a tense, but sure breath.

Then drove it deep into my skin and dug it down my forearm in a straight line to my wrist.

[How deep do you go?] I thought to myself panicking as I heard my mother come ever so closer. [Oh shit, maybe I didn't cut deep enough, I'm not going to die.] The door to the bathroom started to jiggle as my mom went to open it. I switched hands and clumsily drove the razor down my other forearm trying to go deeper. I dropped the razor into the tub when I finished my final act.

I stared at the dark crimson liquid that seemed to define my life anymore as it spilled over my arms. The door opened and I heard a horrified scream come from my mother and I turned my head slowly to her, the blood loss was making me feel faint and light.

I felt everything starting to slip away.

Softly, almost inaudibly, I said my last words to my mother.
"I love you, I just couldn't do it anymore."

I smiled genuinely for the first time since that night. Everything was going fading into darkness now. The last thing I felt was my mom holding me in her arms screaming my name.

Finally, I felt nothing at all.

Glazed.

Taylor Blasko

As I lit another cigarette
slouched over on that dirty mulched up step
from the long days of landscape maintenance
that somehow will always leave the actual dilapidated building unchecked
no maintenance staff for this stoop
but my own black worn so far to white sweats
the mulch and dirt would just turn them back to the black color
and the smell of manured dirt will hide the smoke

I see your glazed over eyes
with your rosy cheeks
and wide goofy smile
stare at me but past me
I think back and question a lot whether you saw me or just knew it was me
as I puffed the cigar again
first time in your presence
were you really present?

I waited ever so patiently for your strong hands to slew towards me
shudder from sheer force of contact
contact made to my smoking hand
as you dutifully slap the tasteful cigar to the ground
I was waiting
expecting
it would have happened had the glaze not been so viscous

Your eyes seem more glazed than usual
the whiskey glaze is evident to few
but it is to me
you walk away like a school boy
as if I'm the father and you're the irresponsible one
I wondered if my eyes were as whiskey glazed as yours

As I contemplate this over another puff of my cigarette.

Katelyn Lucas

Ever since I can remember I've had bad dreams that used to be of vampires chasing me down dark alleyways and T-Rexs with feet so large they could crush my entire house despite my puny waving arms pleading "Please don't kill my family!" in a child's shriek and one time I distinctly remember dreaming of my childhood self trekking through the jungle to save a troop of gorillas being hunted by poachers, *feeling* inside myself the sensation of the bullet when the gun went off on *me*, standing in front of the creatures I loved; it seems ironic now that among the other more "mature" nightmares of falling out teeth or finding myself in class without clothes I dream of a black rhino, running, running, running, from the same men with guns that plagued my youth and maybe that speaks to the consistency of my character or the persistence of my passion for wildlife or maybe it's just the haunting of a memory, now, instead of fictionalized ones; though I still can't believe my introverted freshman-in-college self was able to muster up the courage to travel to South Africa for a month to work as a research assistant on a game reserve because my all-consuming anxieties typically prevented me from doing much of anything outside my comfort zone, or at least not alone, but I *really* went and experienced the place I had dreamt about my entire life, the mecca of wildlife study and conservation, the Eden of the dawn of life and it was simultaneously synonymous with the idyllic imagery I had established of the place in my mind after so many years in the sense that I was finally able to walk among the tracks of lion prides imprinted in the dusty red gravel that stained your nostrils at the end of long days in the field and I could cross paths with migrating elephant herds living in the appropriate social dynamics they so detrimentally lack in captivity and yet it *wasn't*—there was something distinctly different in this place, the *real* place, from my fantasies fabricated from years of watching wildlife documentaries—it wasn't *wild*, or at least it didn't give me the sense of being wild that I'd expected to so starkly contrast my many experiences of visiting zoos, for this place had fences just like exhibits in zoos and these animals were raised and placed here just like in zoos and there were frivolous visitors just like in zoos except they were forced into cars at least, in the hopes of preventing some type of horrible *wild* Harambe incident, although I don't think the public would care as much about a nameless lion lying dead in the five foot tall savannah grasses because that's what happens in the *wilderness* and Africa is where the *wild* things are which is exactly my point because this place wasn't *wild*; there are people everywhere, manning gates, driving safari cars and roaming around with radio equipment and there are houses, even if they don't look like the white picket fence pipe dream we have in America they are *homes* not *wild*, not *wild* people they are *cultures*, and maybe that's the problem we've been historically having: civilization is not always defined in structures, and societies have been coexisting with the wild for years but that does not mean they are wild themselves; in fact, they have been shaping the wild for tens of thousands of years so

maybe the reality is that there never was any wild at all and all of these thoughts run through my mind as I sit in my research team's safari car, dodging sharp grasses from slicing my cheeks through the windowless edges, shivering from the winter morning's cold and suddenly the car jolts to a stop and we all grow silent as a massive figure dashes in front of our vehicle, equating its size, shaking the ground as he ran not so unlike a T-Rex; after the great creature disappeared into the bush, realization hit me that I had just witnessed a black rhino, one of only some 5,000 left in the world and he had slashes in his side, perhaps merely scars, but to my already fading memory of his fleeting visage seemingly red, as if they ran with fresh blood and we tried to follow him to see if he was in danger, to see if we could help while calling into the ranger station to report the incident but he was gone, hopefully hidden well enough that whatever was chasing him would not be able to find him again; later in the day we found a set poacher's trap lying in the dirt while we were doing a habitat survey and we tossed it in our jeep to dispose of it, and its gray, clanking exterior served as a grim reminder that maybe this place was wild after all; though not because of the animals imprisoned here but rather because of the reason they must be imprisoned in the first place and I would repeatedly dream of this black rhino in my South African nights of eerily realistic reveries induced by malaria-preventative medication, I'd dream of the shackle in our safari car, and I'd dream of the face of the main gate-keeper, black and smiling despite a massive, jagged scar running from the edge of his smile to the back of his upper jaw...so when my anxieties and horror of reality keep me up at night mostly what I wanna know is where are those lazy, entitled millennials everyone talks about because I only see ones all-too-active with sadness, with crying for a world they didn't ask to be a part of that they must now suffer the consequences of, the ones not entitled to this world but forcibly authorized to the pain of it, writhing with the *weight* and the *why* of it, and the ones that aren't, well they'll suffer from the ignorance of it as I hear college students ask why all we ever read in English class is *depressing* stuff and I think good *GOD* what I wouldn't give to *believe* that we could just *choose* not to read the depressing stuff, to *believe* on long nights under covers with the lights on that life isn't just the series of unfortunate circumstances, the cycle of suffering, the immaculate reception of desolation that it is.

Afraid you'll sniff me out

Wendy Peterson

Afraid you'll sniff me out

in my guilt-scratched, moth-ball stench,
old trench-coat curtain hideaway. Boot plod
by boot plod partitioning the length of a hallway
by your heavy stride – foot by foot and inches
of coats suffocatingly close in front of my face.
Hear the scratch of your knock and the scuff
of your jeans, pant-legs shift together apart –
and remain altogether silent.

And I squirm to the wooden-slat back of the closet,
eyes clenched shut in the stomach-churning nervousness.

How hard you jiggle the lock unlocked, let the handle slide –
rotating head counterclockwise. I'm starting to react –
feverish and smelly in all the itchy felt and fur,
corduroy and wool. And the Martian-white, probe light
of the hallway lamp severs a closet darkness and the stench
of your work shoes – manly, and rotten,
clotted mud, dried grass stains – toxic paralyzing
of the whole avoiding, the whole hiding – you didn't notice
socks or the feet in them. Didn't notice shock
or tears at endearing words. You shut the door
locked it tight – hidden amid empty coats
and your boots unwashed, untied, disposed until
you run away early again tomorrow.

You never see me anyway. Forget how a name sounds
when it's not slurred in your curses. Forgetting
that a name is not a name unless taunted
unless blamed unless bullied into a word
you can use to profanity a mistake of an unplanned
child that takes up too much time
you don't have time to clock in clock out
as soon as you know I'm not around
the corner but at your shoulder
at the creak of your feet-propped recliner.

You don't see me out in the open. So we play
hide-and-seek hideaway until the shaking
goes away until there are less tears to clean up,
to father after. You never see me:

Tossed in fears alone in the clotted mud-residue that cushions
the closet, a child set aside for someone to look and find
her where she cries but only waits
where the work-mud dries
and the closet door stays shut.

Who's Out There?
Katrina Elk



Coping
Kayla Trace



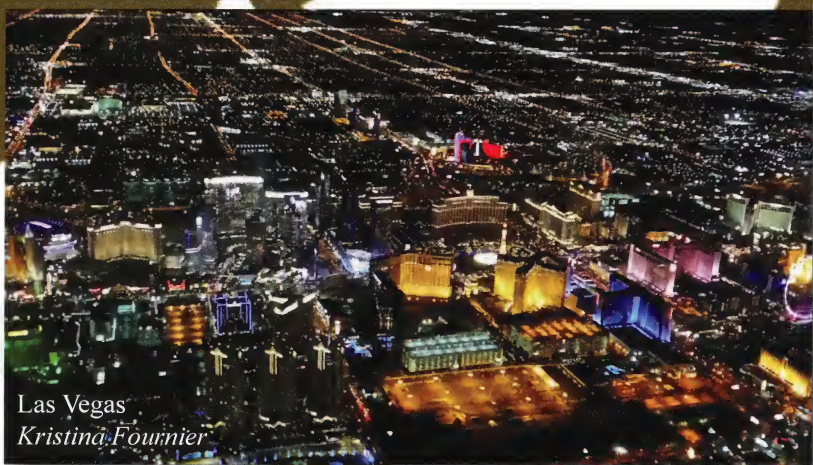
Tokyo Fish Market
Linda Fanning Lefevre



Tim Warfield Band Michener Reflection
Linda Fanning Lefevre



An Apple a Day
Kristin Viviano

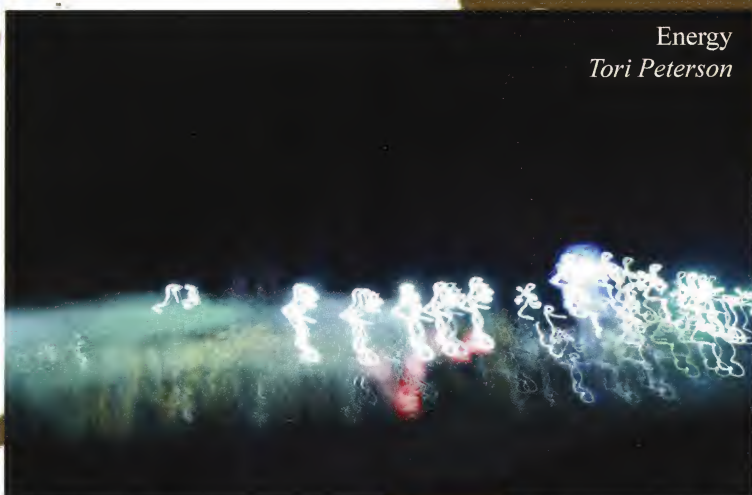


Las Vegas
Kristina Fournier

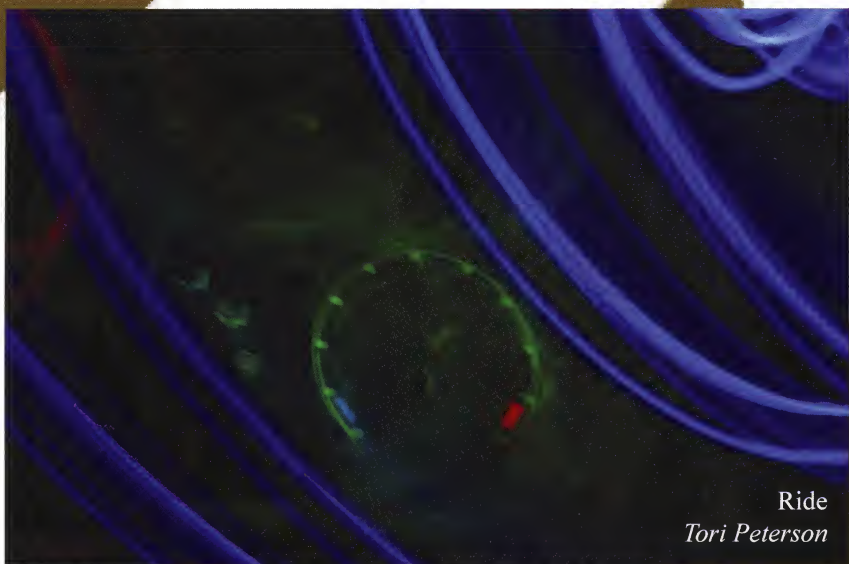


Through Rose Colored Glass
Tori Peterson

Energy
Tori Peterson



Ride
Tori Peterson



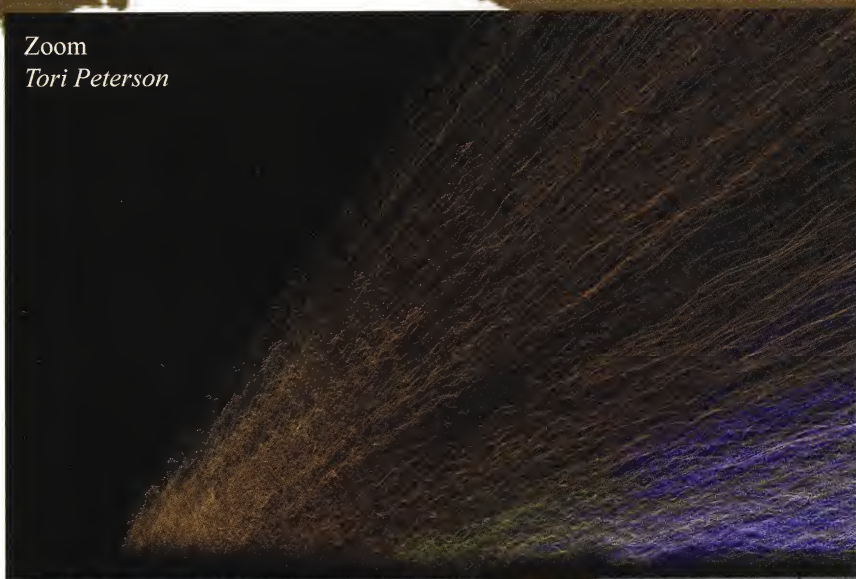


Bad Wolf
Kaliopé Vaporakis

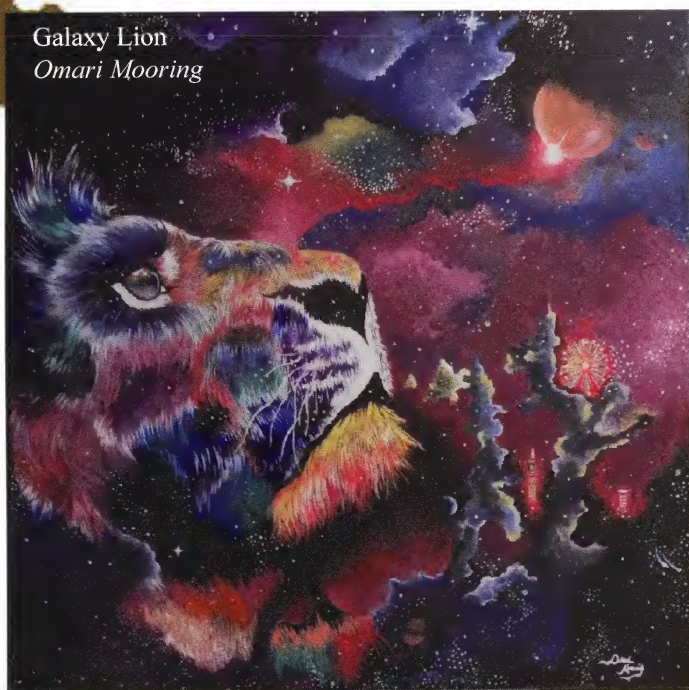


Sunset in Happy Valley
Tori Peterson

Zoom
Tori Peterson



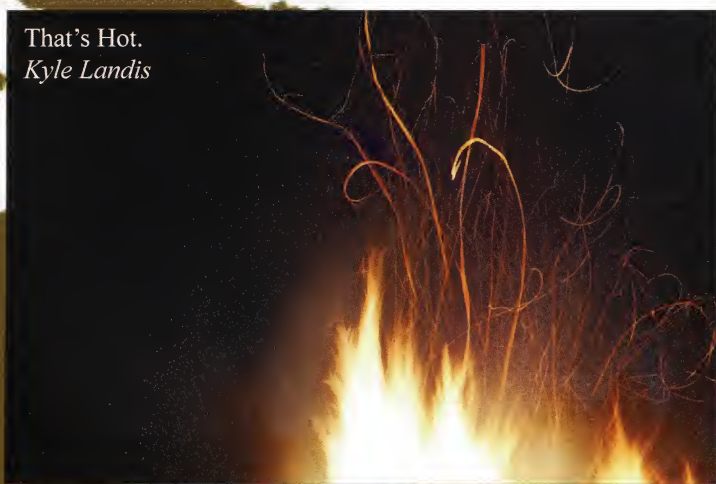
Galaxy Lion
Omari Mooring

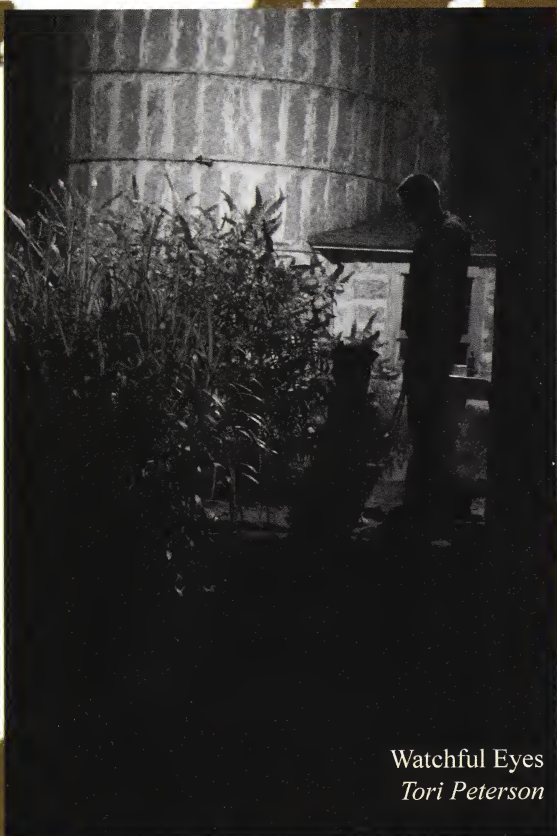


The Wild Within
Jaqueline Lockwood

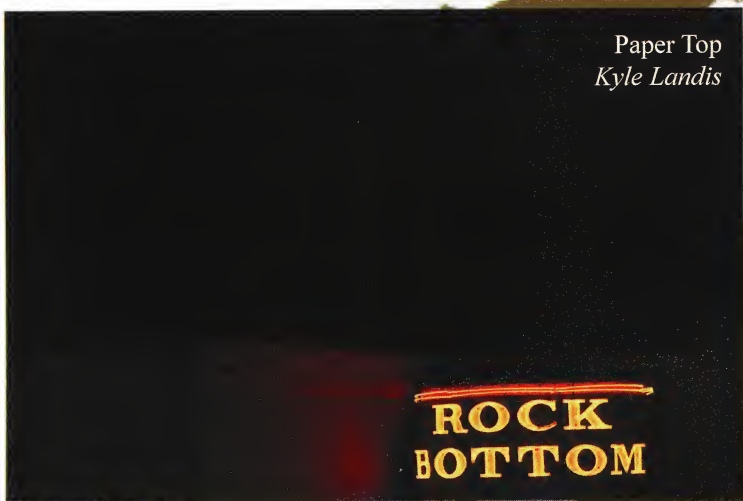


That's Hot.
Kyle Landis



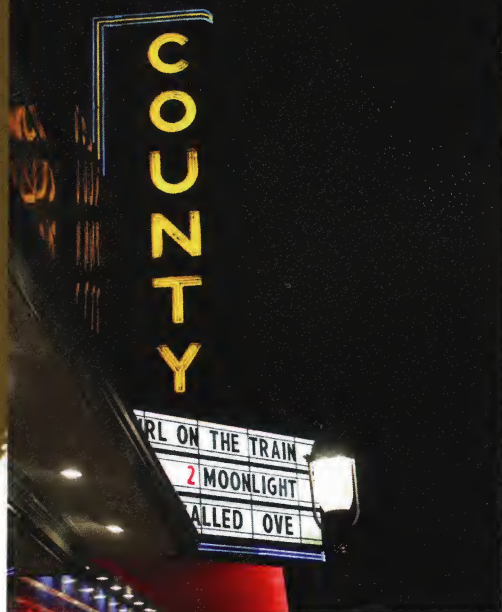


Watchful Eyes
Tori Peterson



Paper Top
Kyle Landis

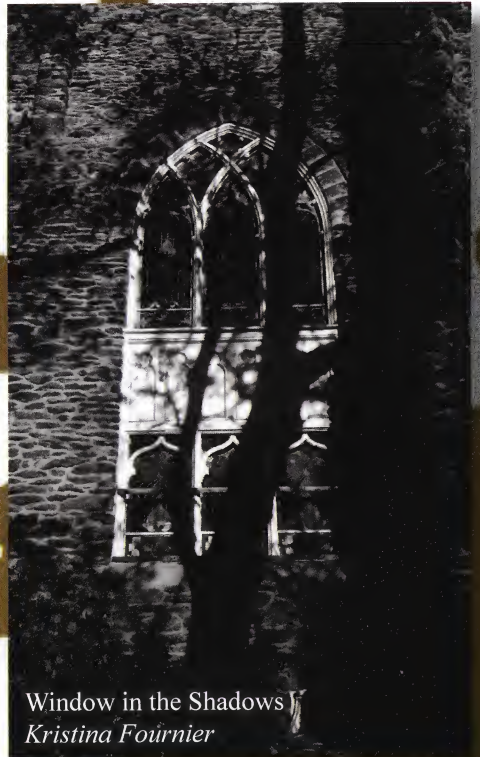
County
Tori Peterson



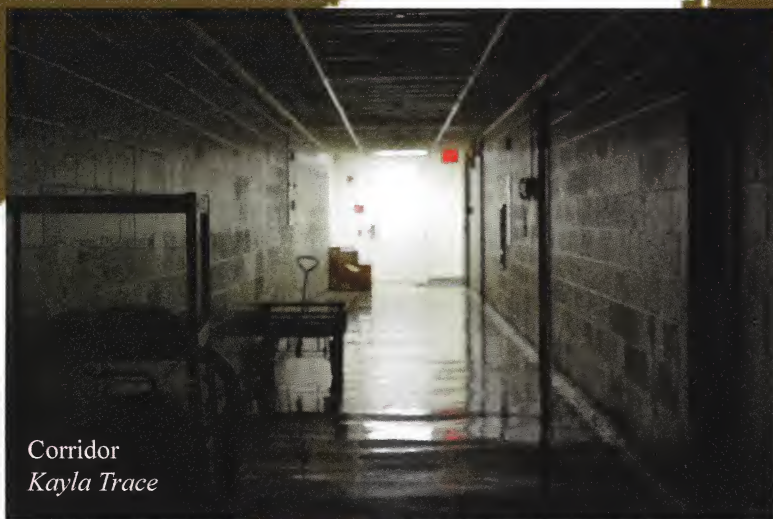
Nope. Thank You. :)
Kristina Fournier



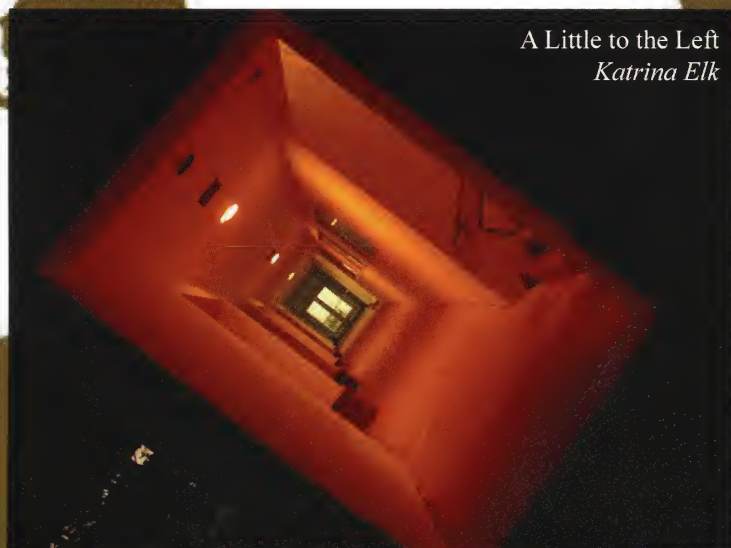
After the Storm
Tori Peterson



Window in the Shadows
Kristina Fournier



Corridor
Kayla Trace



A Little to the Left
Katrina Elk

Dem Bones
John Wasson

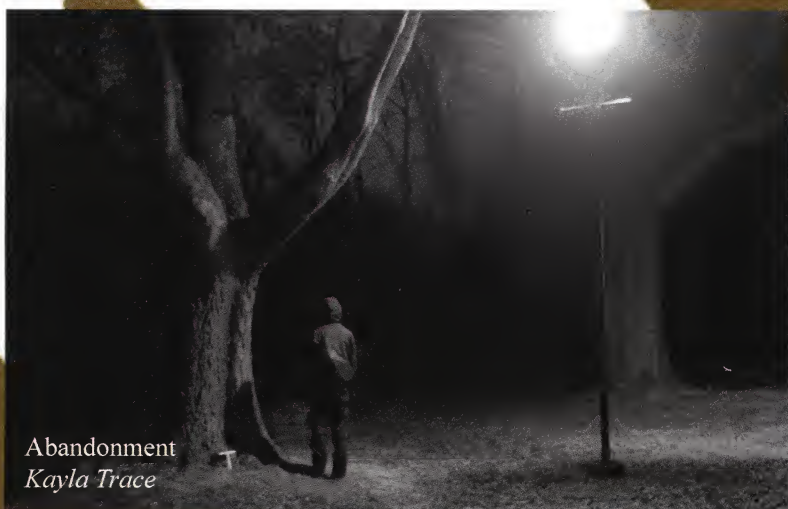


You're a Little Late
Brittany Watson

Groovy
Kyle Landis



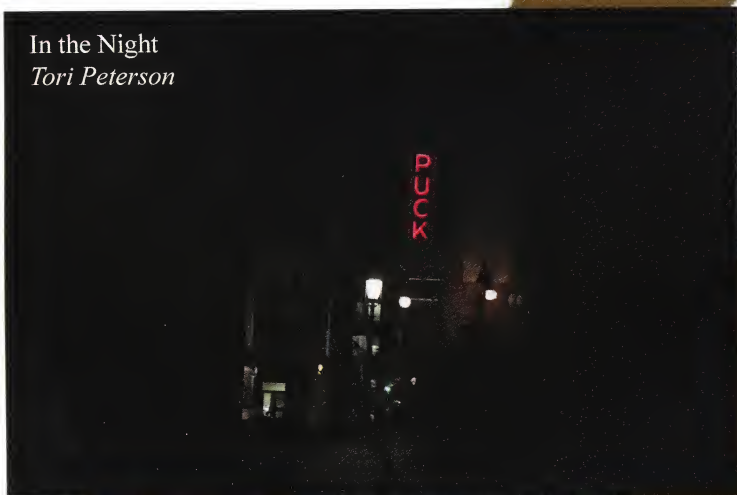
Abandonment
Kayla Trace



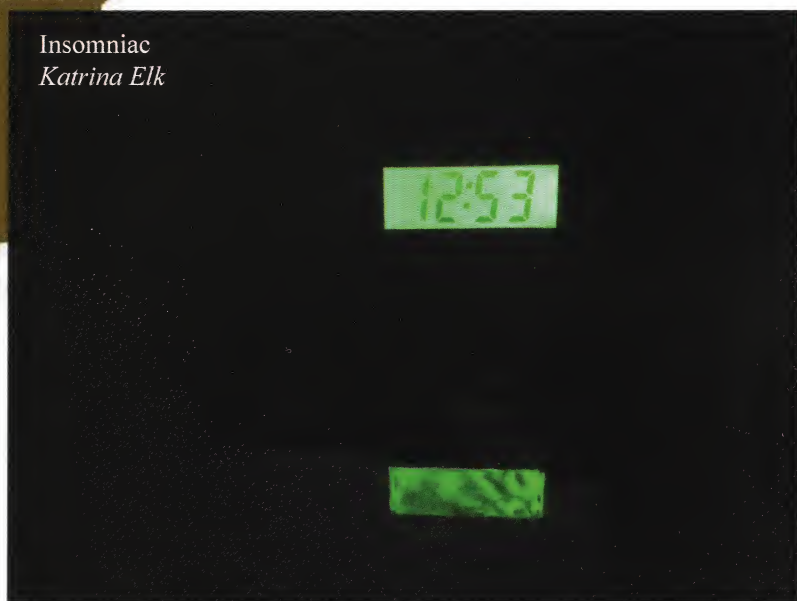
It Wasn't Me
Kyle Landis



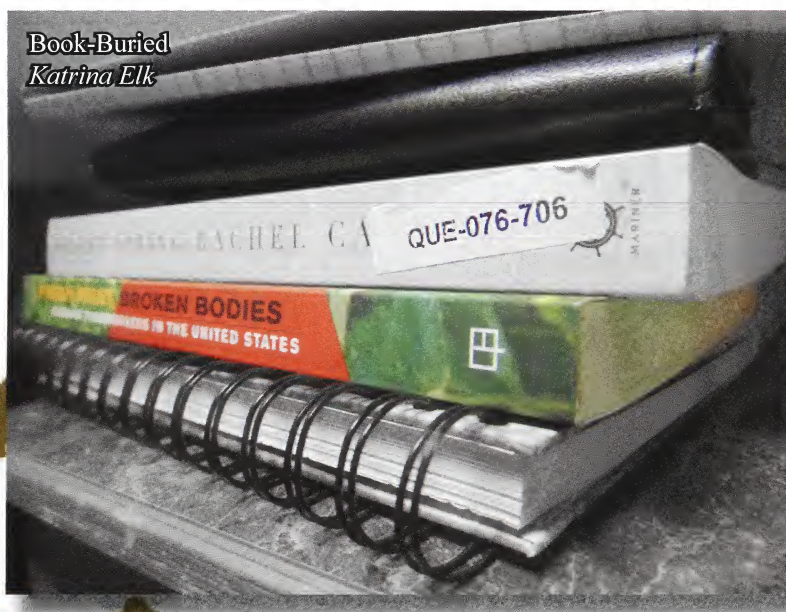
In the Night
Tori Peterson



Insomniac
Katrina Elk



Book-Buried
Katrina Elk



Another Sleepless Night

Alessandra Temerte

First Place 9th/10th Grade Prose
Central Bucks East, Ms. Remar

It's 1:15 a.m. as I am writing this, and I must be up in five hours for school. It's my third night with less than six hours of sleep, and my exhausted mind is clouded with a haze of muddled thoughts. All I want to do is fall asleep, but crushing anxiety keeps me wide awake. Stones of worries tumble through my brain, collecting dust, and expand into boulders of fear and doubt. The allure of the night wraps me in its arms, enticing me to finally let my eyes rest, but I'm counting sheep. I'm counting five, six, seven, eighty-two sheep, but the sheep trip over the fence, and the grass on the farm is turning dark.

It's 2:05 a.m. as I am writing this, and I have to be up in four hours for school. I know I have a test the next day, so I worry about how I will do. I contemplate what color Gatsby's suit was in chapter seven, and whether this fact means anything at all in the grand scheme of my existence. I try mapping out my future and calculating the probability of failing this test, even though I get straight A's. It's tough being a good student when no one sees you're human behind your perfect facade.

It's 2:20 a.m., and I'm still counting problems and flaws. Thirty-three thousand sheep. Thirty-four thousand sheep. Thirty-five—why can't I fall asleep? If I won't fall asleep now, I won't be able to concentrate the next day, and I'll do even worse on the test than I would if I just stopped thinking about it and went to bed. The pale light of the moon slips through my curtains, and I stumble out of bed to gaze at the stars through my window. Their vast expanse reminds me of all the tasks I'm putting off.

It's 2:45 a.m., and I feel like I'm finally drifting off to sleep. But every time I start slipping into a dream, it sours and turns into a nightmare. I didn't get a good grade. My friends are tired of me. I won't be accepted into my dream college. It's just a nightmare, I reassure myself, until I realize I'm still awake, and these thoughts are fragments of the mountain of pressure crushing me each day.

It's 3:10 a.m., and I've come to the conclusion that I have a fever. Yet as I dizzily stand to check my temperature under the dim glow of my phone's light, the thermometer reads a perfect 36.6° C. I'm not physically ill. It's only me—it's only the disease of my own mind. I pace back and forth and try stretching to relax my muscles, but a few splits can't kill the demons in my head. As I pick up a pen to start writing my concerns, my hand shakes. I scratch the pen across my notebook, but the drops of navy ink mingle with dried coffee stains.

It's 3:25 a.m., and my tear ducts have run dry from trying to resolve the cycle I'm caught up in. I drive myself to the brink of insanity, crumbling under the self-imposed avalanche of stress by doing everything I can to get into a good college. But then what? Will I do the same for graduate school? And the same in my career? Will I ever be happy? Am I even happy now?

It's 3:40 a.m., and sleep is finally dragging me into its depths. My vision blurs, the reflections dissolve, and all emotions fade away into oblivion. But as I succumb to the soft release from my thoughts, I can't help but remember that tomorrow is another day with another sleepless night. Anxiety can never rest, and thus, neither can I.

The Way Things Are

Emma Conard

You fell asleep before me while I mapped your body with my fingertips. I knew it would soon become too warm under the comforter with us tangled up as we were, and I wanted to remember every inch that I could before coming up for air. My hand rose and fell softly as you took a great sigh, a tell of yours that sleep had finally claimed you completely. It was my turn to smile as I realized that I knew that about you now.

“Well, shit,” I murmured into the sheets.

This wasn’t supposed to be the way it was going to go. This was going to be a simple, goofy little aside to our busy lives and nothing more than that – we were supposed to be just two friends, with a little extra fun in the sheets thrown in. I wasn’t supposed to know you well enough to tell the difference in your breathing between sleep, dreams, calm, or stress. I wasn’t supposed to be able to close my eyes and see the way the corners of yours crinkle up when you laugh. I wasn’t supposed to be getting used to waking up to you.

But I have been. Despite my own chastising, I count down the days between kissing you goodbye and tasting you again. Whenever you come back to me, my heart races and my stomach turns in adrenaline-fueled excitement just before I open the door to your smile. I tell myself and my roommates that I have this under control and I won’t let myself get in over my head this time, then try to sleep in sheets that still smell like you knowing I’m lying.

They know it too, my roommates. They see the way I compulsively check my phone, hoping that little buzz of a notification was a text from you, and they watch how I smile unconsciously if it turns out to be. They keep their lips pressed tightly together when I trail off into a story of the last time we were together and how cute and how funny and how happy you were and how I just can’t wait to see you, and they narrow their eyes at my insistence that I’m perfectly fine with the way things are and the way they’re going.

But lately I’ve been seeing through my own bullshit, though it took me long enough to catch up to what my roommates already knew. I’m not just lying to them; I’m lying to myself. The way things are in actuality is in no way what we’ve been telling ourselves for these last few months. There’s nothing casual about the longing I have for you; there’s nothing carefree about my feelings. I’m falling. I fell long ago.

I can admit this to myself now. If I can admit it, I can own it and keep it bottled and under my thumb. As if I’ve ever been good at not showing my hand. As if bottling things up and holding my tongue has ever actually worked out in my life. As if I have ever, just once, been able to pull the brakes once I really start going. I can admit it to myself – but I can’t admit it to you.

I hope. God, do I hope that you feel the same way, and are just as scared as I am to bring these thoughts and feelings to the surface, lest they ruin this thing we have going for us. Sometimes I'm convinced you must have feelings for me – how you surprised me during a week that could only be described as absolute shit, the way you flirt and smile when you catch my eye, how you insist that you're there for me no matter what even though we've only known each other a few months. You'll mention plans we can make together for dates far in the future and my heart skips a beat thinking that you picture us together, somehow, for that long. Good night texts send me to bed with a smile and sweet dreams. I curl up with my pillow at night tucked under my chest, wishing it was you, remembering the last time you filled this space and held me close – this pillow doesn't hug back.

And yet I'm so scared. I'm terrified to say any of this to you. Horrified that, should I ever buck up the courage, you'll get that weirded-out polite smile people put on when they realize, yikes, this is too much. My heart tells me to take the chance and leap, love is meant to be an adventure, love is dangerous and that's what makes it sexy, love is scary. My head tells me that what I've got is better than nothing, so don't chance it you moron, you've never been good at math so don't try the odds. My head reminds me that I can't even bring myself to try new foods so adventuring is not exactly the life for me, and this isn't a Bond movie, danger means you'll get hurt. And this is the first time I've used the word love connected to you, so maybe the heart did get something right; love is scary.

I think you must know by now that all these thoughts have been swimming in my head – to my surprise, you have somehow gotten past the walls I've put up. You have been occupying my thoughts for months, but I never thought you would be able to read my mind with such nonchalance and casual ease. I am not used to being vulnerable to anyone, and yet here I am. And for the first time, having someone so close to my thoughts, so close to my heart, isn't scary. I don't feel as though by allowing you to slip between the cracks in my walls that I am under scrutiny. For the first time, I feel as though who I am is enough.

For all my fears and my doubts, I am comfortable. When your fingers slip down my arm in the morning while I pretend to sleep and you watch the goosebumps rise, I am wholly content. The casual way you rest your hand on my thigh while we drive calms my bouncing nerves. When you fall asleep before I do, one arm wrapped around my shoulders, and it's my turn to trace patterns in the dark, there is no worry in my mind, no anxious acid in my gut, only you.

It was hot under the covers tangled up with you, my human space heater. I let my fingers draw one last message on your rumbling chest of these things I can't say to you, and come up for air. In the golden glow from the streetlight below my window, I took one last look at you, my comfort and my insomnia. These moments are my favorite. I would gladly trade dreams of you for loss of sleep, if it meant you were here with me.

This wasn't how it was supposed to go.

That didn't stop it.

Eight

Caroline Wernicki

*First Place 11th/12th Grade Poetry
Voorhees High School, Ms. Heuer*

The raindrops leftover from the storm
The night before raced down the car's window
As the newfound sunlight shined through.
The fresh sunburn still tingled on my legs
as my sweaty skin stuck to the seat. I was eight.

The dim hospital lights forced my eyes to adjust
As I walked out of the powerful July sun.
My yellow shirt and tanned skin contrasted
Against the dreary, white walls. Today was a happy
Day, however. I was eight.

I'd never seen eyes so blue, other than the ones
my dad flaunted. I'd never seen anyone as innocent,
As he was in that moment. He was new to the world
and I was to show it to him. The good, the bad,
and everything inbetween. I couldn't help but smile.

I was eight.

Katelyn Lucas

I watch as the man bends down to look at the artifacts on the bottom shelf of the display, grasping at his back brace as he does so. Wincing, just ever so slightly with the wrinkles of his eyes as he exhales a deep breath. His back is turned to his wife. He thinks no one notices. She gives him a sidelong glance. I stare down at my feet.

A child stares up at me through thick-lensed athletic glasses, the kind with the elastic band that goes around the head. He tells me what he learned about the Native Americans in school, asks me questions. He was really excited to see the teepee. He knows not all Native Americans lived in teepees. Beneath its canopy he asks of bison and bows and arrows and life on the prairie. *That's enough* his mother tells him, chuckling to herself, for me. *You know, you're an annoying little boy.* His sister pokes his arm. He stares at his feet.

The man with the back brace gave me my first tip. Said this place was something special, and I was a great tour guide. He smiled like he understands. I can't remember his name or where he said he was from. But I'd remember his face if I saw him again, smiling like that. Yesterday a woman got mad because she didn't want to pay for a tour of the museum, said she thought it should be free, demanded a refund after she saw. I'd remember her face too. I slipped the five-dollar tip into the donation bin after he left. It was too heavy.

A blind man came in the other day, said another tour guide. *He was with his family. I had to help him around. He kept falling.* I cross and uncross my arms like I always do when I'm uncomfortable or don't know what to say. People notice. People make me nervous. But I love listening to them, watching them, even when I don't know what to say.

I make you nervous sometimes because I'm so observant my mentor says like it should be a question but he's demanding it's true. I cross and uncross my arms because it is true. But it's not a bad thing, like I'm afraid of what he might see. I just don't know what to say, how to explain myself, never did, and only hope that just him being able to observe is enough to understand.

The other day we buried a chipmunk. I felt bad because when I first saw it there, dead, I said *ew*. But it's easier to say *ew* than to be sad. I have to bury my sadness most of the time or it becomes too overwhelming. Though it likes to linger close to the surface, just below the grassroots like where we buried the chipmunk. A shallow grave. Close enough for me to feel its presence when I put my palms to the earth. I hope the chipmunk knows I'm sorry. I can't help but see my dead rabbit when I look into his open eyes. My beloved pet that I found just like him, still and gone, but the tears were already rising from the earth that time. Too late for *ews* to keep them at bay. The sadness was too heavy. Rabbits do weigh more than chipmunks, I suppose. But the chipmunk was the one that got an Indian burial.

Sometimes history itself feels heavy. Especially in museums. I've seen generations walk through these rooms with the weight of it in their eyes, the wiser ones desperately trying to convey it to their children, grandchildren. Some get it. Most don't. I remember one kid walked into our Eastern Woodland room and just stopped, staring up at everything, mouth agape, and blurted: *There's so much history here. I love it.* Those are the lighter moments. But sometimes I find myself staring at everything too, wondering about the hands that shaped pottery 4000 years ago or the feet in tattered moccasins that will never be worn again. They say this place is haunted. I don't think so. I think it's just the weight of it feeling like presence.

Today, faces seem to hang like the humidity in the air. I can feel the weight, and it makes me think of sad things in the spaces between tours that my mind is forced to wander. One sheep. The director comes in and lands heavy in the chair beside me. She feels it too. I never said anything. She begins talking while she gazes out the window in front of her. She tells me about all the work she has to do, about how her help is now three hours late and probably won't show, about how her son almost died. Two sheep. I kept crossing and uncrossing my legs while she described how he was hit by a drunk driver resulting in a multi-car pile up, how the whole family drove over an hour to the emergency room to be with him, how she couldn't bear to see him like that, in so much pain, she had to leave the room sobbing. She was telling me this to explain to me why he couldn't be a police officer like he wanted to. She told me he has dreams about car accidents and that he's afraid to drive sometimes, afraid to sleep even. She doesn't know that I'm afraid too. She doesn't know that my cousin and his fiancé were killed in a car crash just a year ago. She's just heavy and wants to be light again. Three sheep. I don't blame her. I do too. After she leaves my mentor comes and sits in the same chair. Four. His phone rings and his voice raises to meet the one on the other side. *At least I'm moving out soon*, he grumbles after hanging up. I still didn't say anything. But he tells me about how he needs his own apartment to get away from the weight dragging him down. He's heavy too, so he doesn't realize how his words chisel away at my already well-cracked façade of happiness. *Please*, my insides plead, *I'm already heavy enough*, as I ask myself the age-old question of why bad things have to happen to good people and why I seem to be so utterly incapable of ignoring the weight of it.

Sometimes at night I can't fall asleep. Being with my boyfriend helps. Resting my cheek on his warm chest, its rise and fall at least lulling me into a relaxed sort of trance even if my eyes refuse to close or my mind refuses to still. The darkness projects my fears and I'm used to leaving room for its weight in my bed. He doesn't sleep well either. That's why I think he understands. I know that sometimes when he awakens in the night he likes to watch me sleep. So sometimes I tilt my head just enough that he can't see that I'm still awake too. Sometimes he notices and he'll ask me if I'm okay. He reminds me a little bit of the man with the back brace. *Life is just heavy today*, I always reply when he asks. And he smiles like he understands.

Burnout

Taylor Blasko

Outside it was cold as hell
snow flurries on a nice winter-feeling
spring-reality day
you weren't there

The only pull that brought me back to my senses
was the sudden warmth on my fingertips
the warmth that's nice for a fleeting moment
but then the cancer stick burns too close
jump, stop, and shift
it actually starts to burn the flesh
like lesions on baby smooth skin
you act as if it wasn't burning your insides the whole time anyway

It all happened so quickly
that you aren't actually burned at all
face down and no mark is left
on your ashtray smoked hand
that's how you left me too
no real scars
so people just smother me
burnout.

It Matters

Taylor Blasko

"Every once in a while, I look over my shoulder to watch our footprints fade into the wet sand. They fill with water and dissolve back into beach as if we were never here. As if this night weren't being recorded in history."

-Natural Selection by *Kelly Herbinson*

I found myself in Maine. In Maine, walking out of a Subway situated in a building barely able to be considered a strip mall which was behind a gas station. Thinking back, it was a weird set-up but for some reason I really didn't question it all that much. I don't know if I didn't question it because I had never been to Maine, or because I was too blinded by the fact that I was there. How was I even in Maine when yesterday I was in Pennsylvania sitting in my dorm room living my unproductive life as a college student with endless amounts of homework? When did I get so lucky as to actually have exciting and spontaneous things happen in my life? Maybe that's what they call miracles. I'm starting to believe in them more.

I was walking out of the Subway hand-in-hand with the man I'm pretty sure I'll marry. That's probably a dangerous statement to make, but when you've navigated your whole life hating every second of it and someone makes you change your mind, even just for a fleeting second, it makes you question everything you thought you knew about yourself. It makes you understand the assertion that the person you should be with for the rest of your life will make you a "better person" as they say. I'm starting to understand.

There's a die off of seagulls in Maine? I honestly didn't know. I feel like that makes me a terrible Wildlife student. I often wonder what Zoki, the man responsible for getting me to Maine today, thinks about my major in Wildlife Management & Conservation. He often praises my work as an English major, but it's not often that he comments on the Wildlife major. It's honestly a refreshing shift from how everyone else reacts to me, that being—"Wow Wildlife is so cool! But why are you an English major too?"—rather, he revels in the fact that his girlfriend will someday be a future teacher, future professor (or at least that's the hope) of literature. It makes me happy that he knows how to appreciate humanities and science, simultaneously. He was a Computer Engineering student, he's engaged with science while still appreciating culture. I honestly think it's a plight only in American college students these days where we see such a sharp separation of the two. Having a European boyfriend makes me appreciate the world more.

I've explained what being a Wildlife Management & Conservation major means to him, countless times, but I'm not sure he completely gets it. The word "wildlife" was not in his repertoire until the first time he heard me say it—one of the hurdles of communication of having a multi-lingual boyfriend. And so I had to explain. It's interesting how you think you know a thing so well and then can't even explain it. What it means. What it stands for. How it effects you. But I've

basically summed it up in the most simple way I could muster, “Animals, you know, in the wild, in the woods. I try to save them.”

We hopped in the truck, I always got in on the driver side like a weirdo, as to not have to leave his side for even a millisecond, and we rolled out of the Subway parking lot. It was “short” as he always explained to me. That meant that we were probably going to ride the curb. We had no choice. Nothing new. But he had to be careful not to blow a tire out. And we were heavy—80,000 pounds—wheels moved all the way back, making us “even bigger” as he explained it, that is, our turning had to be even wider. Wheels moved back because each axle could only support so much weight, so much stress. Sometimes stress kills.

How did I find myself riding in a full size, 80,000 pound, 18 wheeler truck in the middle of Maine (certifiably, the middle of nowhere)? It’s a good question. But I guess that’s a story for another time because not even my father knew the details of my whereabouts. My mom knew (after I told her when I was already well on my way to Maine [passing through Connecticut]). As we covered more miles I sat in the passenger’s seat of the truck imagining how that conversation had to have gone — “Oh, Taylor’s with Zoki...” and the look on my father’s face when he figured out that what that statement essentially meant was something along the lines of, “Oh, Taylor’s off being a crazy as fuck 21 going on 22 in less than a week year old, riding around somewhere in America in a commercial truck with her foreign boyfriend who just happened to have a CDL license.” At least my parents like him.

As I looked forward (I had been concentrating on the mirrors to see if, or rather when, we would ride the curb) I saw a lone seagull pecking at the ground in front of us. He seemed to be eating some pebbles. Pebbles to keep his crop happy and working, churning away at the food he had to digest. Happy digestion, happy bird. A bird. A seagull. In Maine. Yea sure, I guess that’s a common occurrence. But how could I know since this was my first time in Maine? Besides imagining seagulls on the beach, the second most popular place I always saw them at home was in Whitehall’s Wal-Mart parking lot.

I playfully yelled to him as he was driving closer to the seagull, “Nooo, don’t run over the birdy!” He chuckled at me with that laugh that sounds like it has an accent, even though, how does a laugh have an accent? A laugh just is, isn’t it? And I knew it was silly. And I knew the seagull would fly away, but come to think of it, if seagulls and grackles are falling from the sky in midflight in Maine, maybe that seagull wasn’t going to move. He did move, eventually, but it was a delayed reaction from a bird and it made my stomach drop for a second when I thought we would run him over. Squish. Red paint to white feathers.

We didn’t run over the seagull, but what if we had? How did the seagull feel seeing 80,000 pounds of commercial truck, that happened to be towing rolled paper, coming at his little body? His little body with a big life. What would we do if the seagulls in Maine disappeared? If we would have run over that seagull that would have merely been one blip on the radar of the vast numbers of seagulls that exist in Maine. But if every truck driver thought the same, now we’re talking about killing hundreds, maybe thousands of birds, not just one. And so I had to say

something. What kind of Wildlife major—no, what kind of *person* would I be if I didn't point out the seagull's existence? If I didn't make my boyfriend break a little harder than he usually would for a bird? If I didn't try to save the seagull?

And I think that's where I see the intersection of my two majors. I used to want to be a Wildlife major because I wanted to save animals. I wanted to save the world too, I think. But what kind of person would I be to think that I could play God? To just bury myself in science is to think I can find all the answers. It's to think I can save the world. But I know I can't. Literature and History teach me that. No one can. No one, in the singular form, can save the world. It's only by building humanity up that any of us can at the very least help. Help humanity. Help the animals. Help the environment. Help each other. Help the world. And it's only now that I've come to acknowledge that while I can't save the world, I can save part of some people's view of the world. Or an animal's view of the world for that matter. I can throw the dying grunion into the ocean to save them, and to save the grunion's view of the harsh world and make the grunion see that sometimes each of us can play God, if not only for a brief moment. And does it matter in the end? Did it matter that I saved one seagull? Does it matter if you throw a few grunion back into the ocean? It matters. It matters to the individual. And I've grown comfortable with the fact that while I can't save the world, I can save some of it.

That was my first time in Maine. I contemplated this while I sat in the passenger seat of the truck, in a Wal-Mart parking lot in Connecticut, where I didn't spot a single seagull. No one would remember this red Volvo parked next to a bunch of other commercial trucks that I sat in, but hopefully the seagull that I came face-to-face with in Maine would remember.

Bottle Rockets

Wendy Peterson

We sat in one place
motionless,
nauseous from the spinning of the stars –
feet back and forth prance,
wrist-locked tumble onto our backs,
sputtering in the grass
under our own centripetal force.

Liminal in the alcohol –
bottles crash-landed from our mind-numb
buoyant dance under the amber
spill and splash onto the deep-
space bar-counter,
we could arrange the galaxies by dipping
each swollen finger into a bulb, liquor
and dab it across the bead-sweaty
dock of bottle-rockets out of fuel and cackling
in their failed lift-off
from their seats –
we were air-lifted,

soaring out of swaying-doors
and the manager left us
without gravity
drifting outside

so

we created our own pull,
unidentified flying objects on the axes
of our toes,
and we were planets under stars, stuck
to the vortex of the earth
when we laid back
and hovered
in the whirling of our sky.

AWAKE

Abdullah Pullin

Abnormal.

All that can be said about a somewhere cleansed with silence.

Cleansed of violence. Leaving only the eerie gothic mark of a hoot outside my window.

The calm's like a bomb.

I remember the days when a gunshot would put me to sleep and I wake up, without wounds.

I have wounds healed by a green bandaid

and medicine served to me on a silver spoon in a field of gold.

No wonder I can't go to sleep. You wouldn't either with diamonds outside of your window

The Noctum Cloud

Jonas Schlicter

*First Place 11th/12th Grade Prose
Harriton High School, Ms. Donze*

New Message

From: Dr Matthew Netley (Information control manager)

To: You

Morning Doctor,

I'm currently cleaning up my desk (and I'm assuming you are too), to pack for the journey home. You know how light speed messes with anything that isn't tied down. I'm emailing to let you know you have one more job to do before the captain kicks the ship into high gear, and we can go home. I'm currently wiring the data to your monitor. It's a bunch of audio and video files we found floating around in the auto-backup broadcasts of an incursion sent to an unexplored nebula, nicknamed the "Noctum Cloud". We're actually heading towards the cloud now. We need to pass through it in order to stay on schedule. A little short-cut, if you will. Anyway, you should be receiving the data soon.

Thanks for the help,

Dr. Matthew Netley

United States Outer Space Craft Pilgrim
Data Files
[May 9-14, 3226]

[Transcribed May 17th, 3226]

Earth date: May 9, 3226

Earth time: 8:26 PM

Expedition progress: 3 days, preliminary

[AUDIO FILE]

This is Captain Dale Weinright of the USOSC *Pilgrim* speaking. Our ship has just left light speed, and we have a visual of Nebula 2273, or the “Noctum Cloud” as many of the crew are calling it. Our mission is to confirm (or disprove) that there are massive deposits of gold, silver, and uranium inside a cluster of large asteroids inside the nebula. We expect to enter the nebula in just under two Earth days. I will report back before entry.

[End of log]

Earth date: May 10, 3226

Earth time : 12:18 PM

Expedition progress: 4 days, preliminary

[AUDIO FILE]

The Noctum cloud is right ahead, shining pink. I can't see any asteroid fields from outside the nebula, which is a bit of a relief. I was worried the clouds would be too thin to obscure our ship. Thanks to the density of the fog, no passing ships will have a visual.

[The speaker sounds as if they are taking a bite of something, possibly a granola bar.]

I'm going to take inventory again. I must be sure that I am prepared for the days to come. I don't need things getting out of hand.

[End of log]

Earth date: May 10, 3226

Earth time: 9:47 AM

Expedition progress: 4 days, preliminary

[AUDIO FILE]

This is Captain Dale Weinright of the USOSC *Pilgrim* speaking.

[The sounds of clinking silverware are heard in the background]

Breakfast today is cereal. Our ship is much closer to the Nebula than projected. I swear I only left 15% power to the thrusters. I will leave another log at the time of entry.

[End of log]

Earth date: May 11, 3226

Earth time: 2:54 AM

Expedition progress: 5 days, initiation

[AUDIO FILE]

This is Captain Dale Weinright of the USOSC *Pilgrim* speaking. In a few moments, the ship will pass through the edge of the Nebula. Scanning equipment is already on, and crew is standing by for entry.

[There are a few moments of silence]

Right now we're passing into the Nebula. We are switching as much power as possible to the deflector shield, keeping the scanning equipment active if possible. Now, I'll take the customary roll call.

[The captain clears his throat]

Mechanical Branch: Cooper Rhys, Ryan Worthy, Andrew Scott, Mechanical Officer Seth Reynolds. Pilots and Navigation Officers: Pilot Andrea Fores, Pilot Samuel Seekson, co-pilot Jeffrey Marke, Navigation Officer Trevor Farr, Secondary Navigation Officer Jason Farr. Scientific Branch: Dr. Nathan Grandbrug, Dr. Amanda Dover, Dr. Michael Moor, and Dr. Evan Hayes.

[The captain takes a deep breath]

And lastly, ship administration: Lieutenant David Reinkopf, Lieutenant Moses Demm, and myself, Captain Dale Weinright. Restating our mission, we are tasked with obtaining significant quantities of gold, uranium, and silver inside an asteroid field of Nebula 2273. Asteroid field is projected to be near, approximately 18 kilometers ahead, at 1 o'clock. I will enter another log at the discovery of the asteroid field.

[There are a few minutes of silence]

[End of log]

Earth date: May 11, 3226

Earth time: 6:28 PM

Expedition progress: 5 days, initiation

[VIDEO FILE: taken from the security camera in the bridge of the USOSC *Pilgrim*]

[The captain is standing at his post, ordering the pilots and navigators as they slowly bring the ship to land on the surface of the asteroid. Only half of the previously called staff are present in the room. Based on their locations in the room, It appears that they are the navigation officers and pilots. The surface of the asteroid is visible from the camera's view of the main window. After 20 seconds or so, the ship lands, and the camera shakes slightly. The captain is heard congratulating the present crew members as they finish activating landing procedures]

[End of log]

Earth date: May 11, 3226

Earth time: 6:44 PM

Expedition progress: 5 days, initiation

[VIDEO FILE: taken from the helmet camera of Mechanical Officer Seth Reynolds.]

[Officer Reynolds steps down onto the surface of the asteroid, turning around to take a large crate from another mechanic. He sets the crate next to him, taking two more from the others in the ship, who then follow him outside. Officer Reynolds and the mechanics (now identifiable as Cooper Rhys and Andrew Scott) each strap a crate to their backs. The voice of a Lieutenant is heard over the commlink.]

Lieutenant: "Ok Reynolds, the first deposit is ahead of you, on your eleven o'clock. I've marked a waypoint on your data pad. Head there, and get that drill installed."

[The officer confirms.]

Reynolds: "Roger that. En route now."

[The officer checks his data pad, on which is the estimated location of the deposit is marked on nearly blank map. He motions to the other mechanics, and the group begins to proceed into the thick fog. For about six minutes the group walks in silence on the uneven surface of the asteroid, through the thick magenta fog. Eventually, one of the mechanics, Andrew Scott speaks.]

Scott: "Are we nearly there? This place is creeping me out."

[Cooper Rhys adds.]

Rhys: "Yeah. I'm not liking this fog."

[Officer Reynolds replies.]

Reynolds: "We're only another minute away. Let's just install these drills and be done with this."

[Soon after, the group reaches their destination. Officer Reynolds places his crate

on the ground, opening it and removing a large metal drill, installing it on the surface of the asteroid. They finish, heading to the next drill site in silence. On the way to third drill site, Andrew Scott speaks up again.]

Scott: "Whoa! Guys, check this out!"

[The group turns to face him, pointing to a faint glowing, coming from a small depression in the surface of the asteroid. Reynolds orders them.]

Reynolds: "We'll check it out on the way back, we've got a job to do."

[The group proceeds to the third location, and installs the third drill. Afterwards, they make their way back to the strange glowing spot. Officer Reynolds approaches what appears to be a hole in the surface of the asteroid. He looks into the hole, revealing with his helmet light a tunnel in the ground, lined with some sort of fluorescent pink crystal. Reynolds speaks to the others.]

Reynolds: "I'm going to take a sample for lab testing later."

[He removes a small, one-handed pick from his tool belt and sets a small plastic box on the ground beside him. He sinks onto one knee, lining up the point on his pick with the crystal. Reynolds chips a piece of the soft crystal away from the tunnel wall, placing it in his plastic box. He wipes away the crystal dust and fog condensation from the point of his pick, reattaching it to his belt. He turns to the others the others.]

Reynolds: "OK men, let's get back to the ship."

[The group walks slowly back to the ship, boarding, and going through the re-compression process. The video and audio end as Reynolds removes his helmet.]

[End of log]

Earth date: May 11, 3226

Earth time: 7:58 PM

Expedition progress: 5 days, initiation

[AUDIO FILE]

Substance appears to be a small chunk of pink crystal, with bits of rock and dust attached to one side. The crystal emits a faint pink fluorescence. The crystal is extremely soft, crumbling with little force, and melting into a sticky substance when exposed to moderate heat. Substance shows to contain high levels of carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, and interestingly, silver. There is no evidence of cellular structure, but the substance is largely composed of biological elements. The substance remains crystallized in its natural temperature on the asteroid, approximately negative 268 degrees celsius. Tests show the crystal's melting point is approximately 29 degrees celsius. I will conduct further testing in the next several days. Until then, I will place the crystal in an airtight beaker overnight.

[End of log]

Earth date: May 12, 3226

Earth time: 9:02 AM

Expedition progress: 6 days, incomplete

[AUDIO FILE]

This is Captain Dale Weinright of the USOSC *Pilgrim* speaking. I've just been informed of the start of testing of an unknown substance, crystallized when cold and liquid when warm. I will allow testing to continue for now, but the primary focus of our mission is to finish mining as soon as possible. Several crew members have been appearing to show signs of anxiety, claiming to be "creeped out" by the fog. I can't say I share these feelings, but I am willing to recognize my crew's condition. We can't get our job done if the crew isn't willing to do it. Also, I have received a complaint that a sort of pink film has begun to form near the edge of the window of bunk A. I will send a mechanic to check it out sometime this week. The drills are operating fine, and we will be sending the rover to collect all extracted materials from the drills, which should be in about 45 minutes.

[End of log]

Earth date: May 12, 3226

Earth time: 4:18 AM

Expedition progress: 6 days, incomplete

[AUDIO FILE: found attached to the previous file, and was heavily encrypted. The following is the clearest possible description of the log. The voice is slightly distorted, and is difficult to recognize.]

I don't think the captain knows yet, but something is definitely wrong.

[*A moment of static*]

we found that in

[*Another second of static*]

there seemed to be spots on the walls, almost like handprints.

[*A few seconds of static*]

I was looking out

[*A moment of static*]

something moving in the fog. I feel like I'm being watched.

[*The audio goes to static, with bits of random tones. The audio becomes clear,*

but empty, for a few seconds.]

[End of log]

Earth date: May 12, 3226

Earth time: 11:32 AM

Expedition progress: 6 days, incomplete

[AUDIO FILE]

Substance has solidified overnight, but appears on the verge of melting. In addition, the powdery stone left over from the asteroid is gone. Instead, there is a small, transparent sphere inside the liquid. It appears fragile, so I will wait to remove it from the liquid.

[A short pause.]

Disturbing the beaker causes the crystal to melt again. This shows that the crystal can solidify in any heat, as long as it is left undisturbed. Today I will begin to compose a solution for dissolving the crystal into its component elements. If it turns out there is a lot of this substance, that means we may have a lot more silver than we expected.

[End of log]

Earth date: May 14, 3226

Earth time: 2:40 PM

Expedition progress: 8 days, incomplete

[AUDIO FILE]

This is Captain Dale Weinright of the USOSC *Pilgrim* speaking. Just a few minutes ago, our second drill stopped working, and shows no sign that it's functioning at all. I will send Lieutenant Reinkopf, with Officer Seth Reynolds, Andrew Scott, and Ryan Worthy, to investigate and, if necessary, repair the drill.

[There is muffled conversation between the captain and another crew member.]

In addition, Dr. Evan Hayes has requested to accompany the group, on a suspicion that there may be more of the strange crystal substance from the earlier discovered tunnel inside the asteroid. I will allow this, but I would hope that the drill is re-activated as soon as possible.

[End of log]

Earth date: 14, 3226

Earth time: 3:27 PM

Expedition progress: 8 days, incomplete

[AUDIO FILE]

I shouldn't have let that little bubble inside the liquid grow. It has grown significantly larger over the past several hours, and is now made of some thick, rubbery shell that I can't break with any of my lab tools. It has turned a muddy greenish-brown color, so I cannot see inside it easily. However, call me insane, but there's something moving inside the bubble. I think this is some sort of egg. In addition, it seems that the crystal is spreading. It spilled over the edge of the beaker and onto the table. I don't want to tell the captain about this... The mission was going so well. All I can do now is hope that the mechanics come back alive.

[End of log]

Earth date: 14, 3226

Earth time: 3:19 PM

Expedition progress: 8 days, incomplete

[VIDEO FILE: taken from the helmet camera of Dr. Evan Hayes.]

[Dr. Hayes approaches the hole created by the drill, cautiously peering down into it. He asks the others a question.]

Hayes: "So... who's going first?"

[Mechanic Andrew Scott answers.]

Scott: "I'll go first."

[He grabs hold of one of the support beams holding the drill in place, clipping on a rope from a container next to the drill supports, then attaching the other end to a loop on his belt. The others do the same. One by one, they climb into the hole below. They travel for a few minutes, until the hole opens up into a sort of spherical cavern. The helmet lights reveal that the drill is lying on it's side in the center of the cavern, and is coated in pink slime. Lieutenant Reinkopf speaks.]

Reinkopf: "What the hell is all this stuff?"

[Dr. Hayes answers as he lowers himself to the floor of the cavern.]

Hayes: "This must be the crystal substance Dr. Dover has been testing in the lab. The heat of the drill must have melted the crystal around it."

[The two mechanics stand beside the drill, while Dr. Hayes examines the crystal on the wall. Officer Reynolds speaks.]

Reynolds: "What's up with all these tunnels?"

[The doctor turns, noticing several open tunnels, branching from the central cavern. The doctor walks toward the closest one, looking into it. The light in his helmet reveals that the tunnel goes about 12 meters down, before turning to the left.]

Out of nowhere, there is a shout from one of the mechanics. It is Ryan

Worthy, who had tripped backwards and nearly fallen down one of the tunnels, leaning against the wall of the cavern with his feet against the edge of the tunnel. He speaks to the group.]

Worthy: "It's ok everyone, false alarm. I tripped and almost fell."

[Suddenly, there is a blur of motion at the mechanic's knees. What appears to be some sort of purple, tentacle-like limb wraps around the mechanic's legs, pulling his feet out from under him. He gasps as he is pulled into the tunnel, vanishing from sight, but his screams are clearly heard in the commlink. The captain's voice is heard.]

Weinright: "What's going on?"

[The screaming continues for a few more seconds, until suddenly stopping, followed by a crunching sound, then static. The commlink goes quiet. The lieutenant speaks.]

Reinkopf: "We have to get this drill running as soon as possible!"

[Officer Reynolds responds.]

Reynolds: "What? Screw the drill, we have to leave now!"

[As he finishes speaking, something purple is seen at the top of the camera. A large, glistening creature lands on top of mechanic Andrew Scott. It is about two meters long, with four, four-fingered tentacles attached to its midsection. Its head is shaped like an egg, with four, shiny black eyes all around it. Its mouth takes up a quarter of the head, and is ringed with small, webbed tentacles. The creature's lower half appears to be a sort of fleshy tube, with a sphincter at the tip.

The creature's limbs pin down the mechanic, and the tentacles around its mouth toward him, wrap around his helmet. He screams for a few seconds, struggling frantically. Suddenly, his faceplate is breached, and the creature's tentacles slide into his helmet, wrapping around his head. The creature's head bobs back and forth. It's tail begins to swell, revealing translucent skin under the flaps or its tail. The growing interior is a dark red. Lieutenant Reinkopf runs to his rope, and begins to climb it as quickly as he can. Officer Reynolds runs to his rope, calling to Dr. Hayes.]

Reynolds: "Hurry, follow me up to the surface!"

[Doctor Hayes turns to climb up his rope, but takes one last look at the creature on top of Andrew Scott. It's tentacles release the mechanic, writhing around, dripping with blood. The mechanic's face looks as if it was chewed off, the remains mangled beyond recognition, and mostly drained of moisture. The bulbous tail of the creature quivers rapidly, twitching as the contents begin to change color. They begin to transform from a dark red to a bright pink, the same pink as the crystal lining the cave walls. The creature locks its eyes on the doctor, and begins to crawl towards him.

The doctor hoists himself up, just as the creature seizes him. He pulls

on his rope as hard as he can, but is unable to lift both himself and the creature holding him. The creature climbs onto him, opening its mouth wide, revealing a clawed, tube-like tongue. The creature's tentacles wrap around the doctor's helmet, tongue scraping madly against his faceplate. The doctor's faceplate begins to crack, but he and the creature are suddenly lifted up into the air. The creature suddenly flinches, falling partly limp on top of the doctor, then sliding off of him and dropping to the ground below. The doctor's helmet bumps against the wall in the cave roof as he is pulled out of the cavern by Officer Reynolds. He speaks to the doctor:]

Reynolds: "Reinkopf is gone... He ran back to the ship. Let's go before your helmet breaks open!"

[Both the doctor and Officer Reynolds bound back to the ship. As they approach, they see that is covered in a layer of pink crystal, except for the airlock door, and the main bridge window, which is shattered. Among the crystal are light brown bubbles of various sizes. Officer Reynolds and the doctor leap into the bridge. Officer Reynolds opens a drawer, taking out a pistol. He checks if it is loaded, and then approaches the door to the rest of the ship. He presses a button, but the door is locked on emergency airlock. The doctor turns around, noticing the corpse of the captain, slumped over the control panel, sporting several bullet wounds. In addition, the doctor spots the lifeless bodies of Rhys, Seekson, Marke, Demm, and both Farr twins, littered about the room.]

The doctor and Officer Reynolds go to the airlock door, opening it and compressing the room, opening the interior door, but leaving their suits on. Inside, one of the creatures is in the hallway, beside the body of Dr. Grandburg. The creature's "tail" is bulging with it's glowing pink contents. The creature is rubbing the end of its tail against the wall, spreading pink slime all over the walls and floor. The creature turns toward the doctor, and Officer Reynolds shoots it in the back. It hisses, crawling toward them. Officer Reynolds shoots it two more times, and it drops to the ground, dripping with chrome blood. Dr. Hayes crouches over the body, holding a small hand-held scanner up to the blood. After a few seconds, it beeps, displaying a chemical formula on the screen. Dr. Hayes reads a point on the scanner aloud.]

Hayes: "47% silver. This is why our scanners couldn't find any silver. There must be basically no elemental silver on the asteroid, but there's a ton in the blood of these things, and this crystal. If the fog in the air comes from their tails, then anything that enters the 'nebula' is doomed."

[Suddenly, Lieutenant Reinkopf bursts through a door in the hallway, raising a pistol and shooting Officer Reynolds in the chest twice. Dr. Hayes dives under a table on the other side on the hallway. Lieutenant Reinkopf begins to shout at Officer Reynolds as he shoots him.]

Reinkopf: "No one can know! No one can know!"

[A pool of blood forms around Officer Reynolds. Lieutenant Reinkopf turns around, reloading his pistol as he spots Dr. Hayes in his hiding spot. Then, the Lieutenant is tackled from behind by one of the alien creatures. As he is killed by

the creature, another grabs Hayes, pulling him from under the table and jumping on top of him. The creature breaks through his helmet, cracking the camera.]

[End of log]

Earth date: May 14, 3226

Earth time: 3:32 PM

Expedition progress: 8 days, abort

[AUDIO FILE]

This is Captain Dale Weinright of the USOSC *Pilgrim* speaking. I am issuing a distress call to any nearby ships. Our craft is heavily damaged and we require im-

[There are multiple gunshots, followed by a thump.]

[End of log]

[End of files]

You breathe deeply, taking the last sheet of paper from the printer as you watch it finish. Dr. Netley walks into the room, knocking lightly on your door. "Great job getting your work done," he says, "we got to take the scenic route!" You turn, gazing in terror at the pink fog outside the window. "Isn't it beautiful?" Dr. Netley asks. There is a muffled thump on the outside of the ship. You gasp. "Don't worry," Says Dr. Netley, "It's just some light debris. This ship is tougher than it looks. What's with the scared face? We're already headed home; there's nothing to worry about."

End



STAFF

Co-Editors

Katelyn Lucas, Taylor Blasko

Managing Editor

Leslee Blahut

Layout Editor

Roseann Ivers

Events Chair

Katelyn Lucas

Social Media Coordinator

Katerina Ramos



STAFF

Publication Assistants

Wendy Peterson

Omari Mooring

Jessica Holster

Sierra Plath

Calla Gibson

Zoey Houser

Kaliope Vaporakis

Tiara Dwight

Publication Advisor

Dr. Wilbert Turner, Jr.

COLOPHON

27" iMac

Adobe InDesign, CS6, Version 8.1

Printed and Perfect-Bound by Thomson Shore, Inc.

Dexter, MI

500 copies, 72 pages

Cover: 12 pt C1S Gloss Layflat Lamination

Black & White and Color Pages:

100# White Text Matte

Fonts

NeoPrint M219

Times New Roman

Wingdings

Editors evaluate submissions for each category through a blind review process. Many were kept up at night by the making of this publication.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Allison Byruch

Dr. Linda Maisel

Doug McCambridge

Maria Smith

STAY CONNECTED

with *The Gleaner*



/delvalgleaner



delval.edu/the-gleaner



The Gleaner at Delaware Valley University



delvalgleaner@gmail.com



@DelValGleaner



